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ABSTRACT

Prepared to meet the need for published factual data, this report on correspondence schools in Western Australia is designed to aid the education department in the upgrading and planning of correspondence education for the rurally isolated. Following the pattern of a 1974 questionnaire which sought information from parents (67 percent response) of isolated correspondence students, this report presents both tabular and narrative data relative to: (1) Isolated Children: Demography (population distribution, occupational distribution, school year, degree of isolation, residential stability, accommodation); (2) Financial Assistance to Isolated Families (direct financial assistance, indirect financial assistance, taxation and direct financial assistance, parents' view of financial assistance); (3) Learning in Isolation (subjects, learning methods and media, supervision in the home, camp schools); (4) The Western Australian Correspondence School (brief history, administration and staffing, accommodation, school library, course development); (5) Schools of the Air in Western Australia (background, administration and staffing, equipment, accommodation, mode of operation); (6) Projected Plans for the Education of Isolated Children (Chidley Centre--special education facility for isolated children, the Isolated Schools Matriculation Project); (7) Parental Views (responses to the 1974 questionnaire). (JC)

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THE EDUCATION OF ISOLATED CHILDREN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

RC008956

RESEARCH BRANCH
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE EDUCATION OF ISOLATED CHILDREN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

PREFACE

In the past, discussions surrounding the needs of isolated children have been characterised by a lack of published factual data and consideration of the opinions of parents.

This Report has been prepared to remedy this situation and assist the Education Department with the up-grading of the quality of correspondence education available in this State and to facilitate the planning of new developments which will compensate in some way for the isolation experienced by children living in remote locations.

The Report does not attempt to make recommendations for future action although it does point to certain features of correspondence education in need of attention.

The opinions expressed within the Report are those of the respondents or authors and does not represent the official views of any organization unless specifically designated as such.

The comments from parents are verbatim transcriptions from questionnaires. In the opinion of the authors they represent genuine attitudes though it is possible that they may contain factual inaccuracies.

The contribution of all those who in any way aided the preparation of this report is acknowledged with gratitude.

W. McATEE T.L. ZANI

RESEARCH BRANCH

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for This Study

The vast area of Western Australia and the nature of the population distribution impose a demand for a variety of educational sub-systems to suit the needs of various groups of students. The Education Department has always recognized the need to provide educational facilities for all groups so that each child has an equal opportunity to develop his or her abilities, individual judgement and sense of moral and social responsibility. Children living in isolated areas form a group which is recognized as requiring some specific consideration. Since 1918 these children have received their lessons by correspondence. Subsequent developments have included the building of small rural primary schools, the introduction of bus services and later, schools of the air broke the silence of correspondence education.

Recent years have witnessed significant changes in education in general. New buildings, teaching methods, learning materials and audio-visual teaching aids have been introduced to many schools. The need to maintain parity between the educational techniques of correspondence schooling and general schooling means that up-to-date information should be available to planners about the educational circumstances of children living in isolation.

Of late there has been increased interest in the needs of children living in relative geographic isolation. A new set of financial allowances for the education of isolated students was introduced by the Australian Department of Education in 1973. The Western Australian Education Department is establishing a special school for isolated students at Chidley Point near Perth at a cost of nearly one million dollars. The Karmel Committee Report (May 1973) drew attention to the special educational problems of isolated children and recommended further investigation into the provision of educational facilities.

The decision to write a comprehensive report was made against this background of increased interest and the desire to see that geographically isolated children are not further disadvantaged because of inferior educational experiences.

1.2 The 1974 Research Branch Survey of Isolated Children

On 16th May 1974, 241 questionnaires for parents of isolated children were despatched to those families having children studying by correspondence. In addition, the headmasters of 28 small isolated schools having correspondence students studying at secondary level were asked for their comments on certain questions. The staff of the Correspondence School and schools of the air were also given the opportunity to offer comments regarding ways of improving the educational experience of isolated children.

The questionnaire sought information from parents about the following broad issues: financial allowances, learning in isolation, camp schools, learning materials, audio-visual aids, home supervision, the Chidley Centre and communications. In addition, relevant biographical data was sought.

There were 162 questionnaires returned from parents which represented a sample response rate of 67 per cent, and which provided basic information for the report. Extensive information was provided by the Headmaster of the Western Australian Correspondence School and members of his staff. Important insights were gained as a result of a visit to the Kalgoorlie School of the Air.

This report broadly follows the pattern of the questionnaire, as outlined above.

2. ISOLATED CHILDREN: DEMOGRAPHY

After briefly placing Western Australia within the Australian context, this chapter describes the nature and extent of the problem of making formal provision for the education of children living in geographically isolated places in Western Australia.

2.1 Population Distribution in Australia and Western Australia

Australia as a whole is a very sparsely populated country with an overall density of 1.66 persons per square kilometre. The population is strikingly concentrated in the south-west of Western Australia and in a belt within 350 kilometres of the coast from Port Pirie in South Australia, to Rockhampton, Queensland, with coastal patches northward to Cairns.

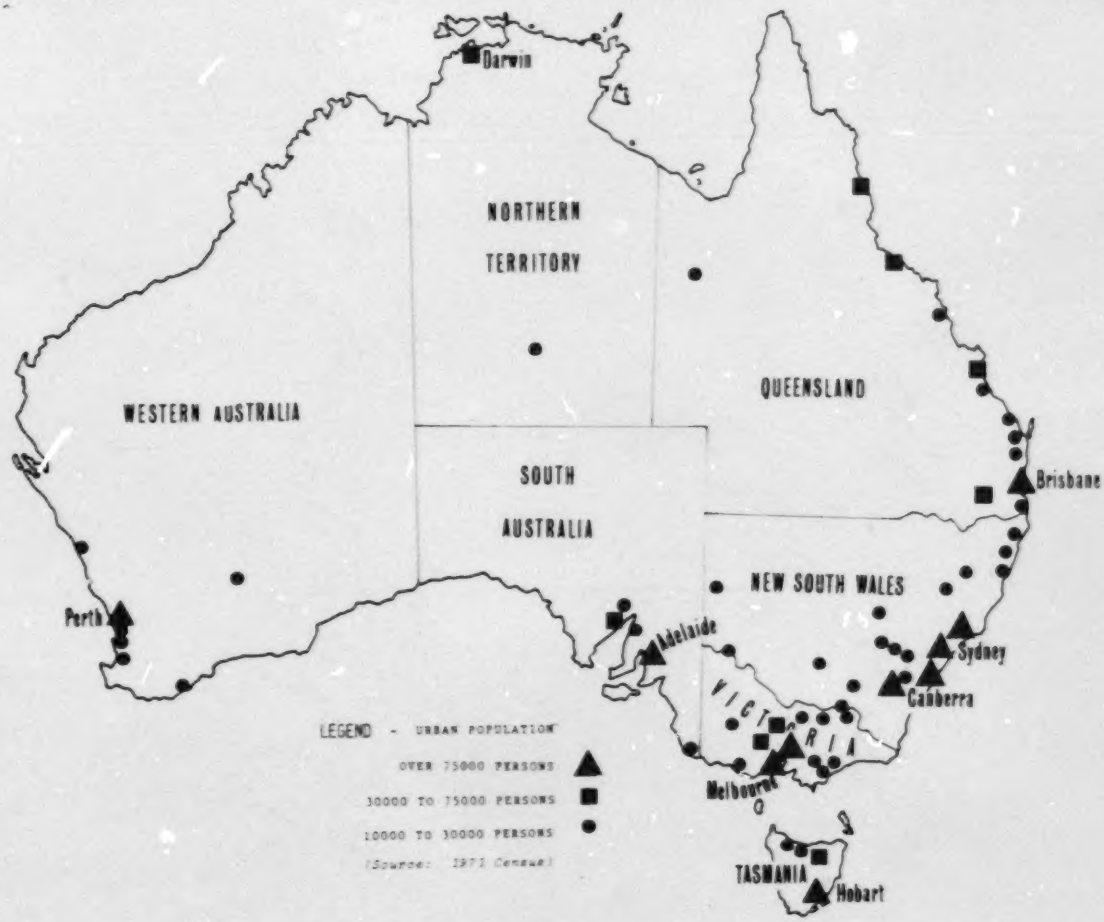

Figure 1. Population Distribution in Australia.

Even in this coastal belt many empty tracts remain: between two and four people per square kilometre is a relatively dense rural population, while six or more represents either particularly intensive, often irrigated agriculture, or peri-urban development. Inland, large tracts are empty, and one person per two square kilometres represents relatively dense settlement.

The average density in Western Australia is less than one person per two square kilometres (0.41 persons per square kilometre). This is higher than the Northern Territory but in the tropical third of Western Australia which has only two per cent of the State's people, the density is similar. Three quarters of Western Australia's population live south-west of a line from Geraldton to Albany.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of population centres with more than 10,000 people in Australia as revealed by the 1971 Census.

In Australia over 80 per cent of the population live in centres with more than 10,000 people. Except in Queensland and Tasmania well over half of the States' population are in the capitals (South Australia 71 per cent, Victoria 69 per cent, Western Australia 68 per cent, New South Wales 60 per cent, Queensland 47 per cent, Tasmania 38 per cent); the gap between the State capital and the next largest city is very large. Moreover, of the increase of just over one million in total population during the five year intercensal period, 1966-1971, the six State capitals took over 75 per cent. Fastest growth was in the Northern Territory (51.3 per cent) followed by the Australian Capital Territory (49.8 per cent). Of the States, Western Australia was far ahead of the others, (21.1 per cent). Queensland (8.9 per cent), Victoria (8.6 per cent), and New South Wales (8.3 per cent) were comparable. Tasmania (7.1 per cent) had the lowest rate of growth.

The most sparsley people areas of Western Australia show a tendency to decrease in population with any increases usually linked with new developments such as the Pilbara iron ore project and the Ord River project.

This population distribution and growth pattern in Western Australia has at least three implications for educational administrators. Firstly there appears to be a decline in the rural population and yet there are several prominent growth centres particularly in the north-west where schools are needed. Secondly there is the high degree of urbanization, particularly in the south-west where large schools can be built to cater for large numbers of students. Thirdly there are the vast tracts which appear empty yet do have a small but significant geographically isolated population. It is the children from these isolated areas with whom this report is concerned.

2.2 Occupational Distribution of the Workforce in Western Australia, 1973

Most people in the isolated areas of Western Australia are engaged in primary production which accounts for 51 per cent of the State's total export value. Pastoral and agricultural products are of roughly equal importance dominated by wheat and wool. Mining of minerals is increasing and accounts for 56 per cent of primary production. People engaged in new ventures tend to be situated in developing towns where schools are provided so that it is mainly those people engaged in the pastoral and agricultural side of primary industry who live at great distance from other families. Of the people engaged in factory work 85 per cent live in the Perth area. This is in direct contrast to those people engaged in primary industry of whom 85 per cent live outside the Perth area. Table I shows the geographical distribution of major occupations in Western Australia.

TABLE I

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR OCCUPATIONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA (Source: Western Australian Year Book 1974, p.493)

Division	Primary Industry (including Mining)	Manufacturing	Wholesale and Retail
Perth	15%	85%	79%
South-West (includes northern, central and southern agric.)	52%	12%	16%
Other	33%	3%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

In the Survey* it was found that most (65 per cent) of the families who have children on correspondence are engaged in primary industries. Table II shows the occupation of the father of the family as revealed by Correspondence School records and the Survey.

TABLE II

OCCUPATION OF FATHER OF FAMILY (Number of families and per cent of total enrolled at correspondence school)

Source	Pastoralist	Station Manager	Fisherman	Other	Not Known	Total
Correspondence School Records	71 29%	48 20%	41 17%	70 29%	11** 5%	241 100%
Response to Questionnaire	44 27%	44 27%	18 11%	53 33%	3*** 2%	162 100%

** Not shown on enrolment forms
*** Questionnaire returned but no response to this question

There was some difficulty in deciding between the categories of pastoralist (owner of property) and manager, and between manager (or overseer) and some "other" occupations. However, where "manager" or "overseer" was stated it was accepted as manager and farm occupations such as stockman, shearer, fencer, windmill builder, mechanic were classified as "other". Some of the other occupations were dogger, carpenter, retired watchmaker, light-house keeper, evangelist, diver, driver, prospector, wool classer, motel proprietor, kangaroo shooter and missionary.

The four broad categories in Table II show that the response to the questionnaire was reasonably representative of families with children enrolled for correspondence lessons, at least in terms of the occupation of the father.

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* 'Survey' throughout this report refers to the 1974 Research Branch Survey of Isolated Children.

2.3 Isolated Children in Western Australia

The Education Department of Western Australia has defined an isolated child as one who, because of the geographic location of his home, does not have reasonable daily access to a Government school providing courses at appropriate levels. This includes children in geographically remote areas of the State (e.g. Kimberleys, Pilbara, north-west) and children in areas not considered geographically remote but who by virtue of transport arrangements cannot attend a school suited to their needs. It also includes children of secondary school age for whom only primary schools are available because districts are too small to support a high school. The location of families with children studying by correspondence at primary or secondary level is shown in Figure 2.

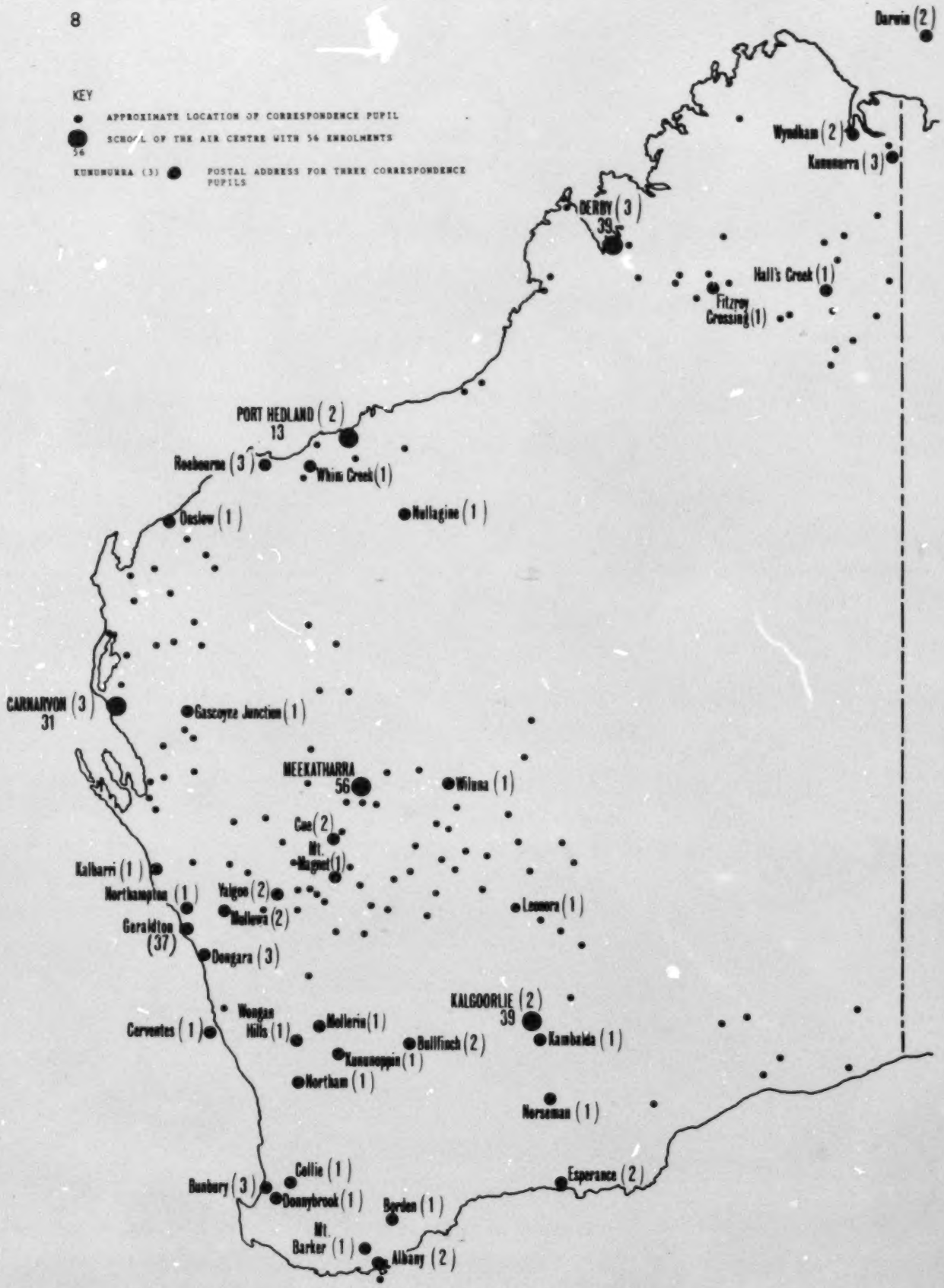

Figure 2. Location of Correspondence Pupils in Western Australia.

2.4 School Year of Children on Correspondence in Western Australia

By far the greater number of full-time enrolments in the Western Australian Correspondence School are in primary Years 1 through to 7. In 1974 there were 384 full-time primary enrolments and 92 full-time secondary enrolments. In addition there were 585 part-time enrolments of whom, 573 were secondary and 12 were primary. About half of the part-time students are members of the Police Force and have not been included in the Survey.

The enrolment as at 1st August 1974 for the Western Australian Correspondence School is given by Year in Table III.

TABLE III

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL ENROLMENT BY YEAR AS AT 1ST AUGUST, 1974

Year	Enrolment	
	Full-time	Part-time
Primary 1	70	1
2	71	2
3	68	-
4	42	-
5	51	2
6	39	3
7	43	4
Total	384	12
Secondary 8	32	72
9	33	353
10	27	148
Total	92	573

Of the pupils enrolled full-time in Years 1 through to 7 of primary school 178 were enrolled with a school of the air. These pupils have the advantage of a half hour per day session in which they may talk with their school of the air teacher and fellow students by means of two-way radio communication.

In Table IV, the response to the questionnaire reflects the greater number of primary enrolments revealed by the Correspondence School records above.

TABLE VI

NUMBER OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CORRESPONDENCE YEARS

	Primary	Secondary	Primary and Secondary	No Response	Total
Number	139	6	11	6	162
% of Responses	89%	4%	7%	-	100%

2.5 Degree of Geographic Isolation

The degree of isolation of families with children on correspondence in Western Australia can be shown in terms of their distance from the nearest Government school, their distance from public transport and the distance from their nearest neighbours.

The reason that most children are on correspondence lessons is that they live more than 20 miles (32.2 kilometres) from the nearest school. However, there are some children on correspondence who live less than 32 kilometres from a school but who by virtue of transport arrangements cannot attend. Table V shows that 90 per cent of the families with children on correspondence who responded to the questionnaire are situated more than 32 kilometres from the nearest Government primary school.

TABLE V

DISTANCE OF FAMILIES FROM NEAREST GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Distance	No. of Families	% of Response
Less than 8 kilometres	7	5%
9 - 32 kilometres	6	4%
33 - 161 kilometres	84	57%
More than 161 kilometres	49	33%
Do not know	1	1%
No response	15	-
Total	162	100%

Where children live 32 kilometres or more from the nearest Government school, regular attendance is not practicable because of time-tedious travel. Although the Education Department allocates about $4 million per year for bus services to transport country children up to 32 kilometres to and from school each day, there are still a significant number of families who live more than 32 kilometres from the nearest bus service.

Table VI shows that 80 per cent of the families who responded to the questionnaire live more than 32 kilometres from the nearest form of regular public transport for mail and passengers. There are at least 44 families (30 per cent) who live more than 161 kilometres from the nearest form of regular public transport. Children of these families deserve special consideration because of their isolation which is not only geographic but also social. It is realized that children in some metropolitan families may be socially isolated, but the position of geographically isolated children makes them unique and suggests they are a special case.

TABLE VI

DISTANCE OF FAMILIES FROM NEAREST FORM OF REGULAR PUBLIC TRANSPORT (For mail and passengers)

Distance	No. of Families	% of Response
Less than 8 kilometres	18	13%
9 - 32 kilometres	10	7%
33 - 161 kilometres	72	50%
More than 161 kilometres	44	30%
No response	18	-
Total	162	100%

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In urban and suburban areas it would be difficult to find a family separated from their nearest neighbours by more than one kilometre. Yet in the isolated areas of the State more than half of the families live more than 32 kilometres from their nearest neighbours. This is unavoidable since the areas are vast and grazing properties are large, but for children in these areas their educational environment is different from that of most other children in the State. For the children in families more than 161 kilometres from their nearest neighbours the possibility of even a weekly contact with children their own age is remote. Table VII shows that a small number of families who responded to the questionnaire are situated more than 161 kilometres from their nearest neighbours who also have children taking correspondence lessons.

TABLE VII

DISTANCE OF FAMILIES FROM NEAREST NEIGHBOURS (Who also have children taking correspondence lessons)

Distance	No. of Families	% of Response
Less than 8 kilometres	26	17%
9 - 32 kilometres	16	11%
33 - 161 kilometres	84	56%
More than 161 kilometres	7	5%
Do not know	17	11%
No response	12	-
Total	162	100%

2.6 Residential Stability of the Isolated Population

When a population is stable, predictions concerning enrolment and supplies of equipment are made easier. Correspondence between families and the Correspondence School is much more reliable and children have time to adjust to the system. The education of children in families which move to different addresses within a school year is an administrative problem. The most difficult aspect is the despatch and return of lesson sheets and communication generally, but there are also problems associated with the physical conditions for learning.

In the Survey it was found that more than one third of the families were permanent residents (more than 10 years). On the other hand, more than 20 per cent of the families had resided at their current abode for less than one year. Table VIII shows the degree of permanence of the families in the Survey.

TABLE VIII

YEARS OF RESIDENCE AT CURRENT ABODE

No. of Years	No. of Families	% of Families Responding
Less than 1 year	33	22%
1 - 2 years	18	12%
3 - 5 years	29	18%
6 - 10 years	21	13%
More than 10 years	55	35%
No response	6	-
Total	162	100%

2.7 Type of Accommodation

Associated with the stability of the isolated population is the type of accommodation. Where families reside in their own house or station homestead correspondence is more reliable, radio contact with the flying doctor is possible and children can be provided with a stable educational environment. While itinerant families may provide some exciting experiences for children, formal education is broken up and the physical conditions may not be conducive to learning.

In the Survey it was found that more than one third of the families lived in their own house, or station homestead. About one quarter of the families appeared to be itinerant, either living in caravans, tents or workers' quarters. Table IX shows the type of accommodation of the families in the Survey.

TABLE IX

DESCRIPTION OF FAMILIES' ACCOMMODATION

Type of Accommodation	Number of Families	% of Response
Caravan/Tent	20	14%
House (Rented)	12	8%
House (Owned)	57	38%
Workers' Quarters	23	15%
*Other	37	25%
No Response	13	-
Total	162	100%

* When the response to 'other' was analysed, it was found that some parents referred to their "station homestead" in this category.

3. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ISOLATED FAMILIES

3.1 Introduction

Governments have for some time recognised that special financial assistance to families living in geographical isolation is one way of partly equalising educational opportunities for the children of such families. When children live away from home in order to attend schools their parents incur expenses additional to those of parents whose children live at home. Such expenses include travel, special clothing, tuition fees, and accommodation costs. Many isolated children remain at home and enrol for correspondence lessons. Particular problems faced by parents in this situation include the absence of peer contact for their children, lack of community facilities and services and the absence of information sources in the home.

Financial aid to parents to help them overcome these hardships has taken a number of forms. Such moneys may be paid directly to the parents or may be used to provide services such as hostel accommodation and camp-schools.

Since 1st January 1973 the Australian Government has assumed the major role in the provision of direct financial assistance to isolated families. Prior to this, the State Government paid a boarding allowance and a supervision allowance to those who qualified. Two State zones were delineated (Zone B was basically the south-west of the State and Zone A the remainder of the State). Parents of children in primary years and the first three years of high school received $261 per annum if their home was in Zone A and $210 per annum if their home was in Zone B. Children in years 11 and 12 received $312 and $252 for Zones A and B respectively.

Parents who engaged a person so that their child or children's education might be supervised at home received an allowance from the State Government. The rate was $300 per annum for one student in the family, or $400 for two or more students in the family. The provision of indirect assistance has remained the prerogative of the State Government and covers hostels, travel assistance schemes and transceivers.

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 which follow describe the existing range and extent of financial assistance to parents of isolated children.

3.2 Direct Financial Assistance

Australian Government financial assistance to parents for the education of isolated children began on the 1st January, 1973. The allowances are administered by the Australian Department of Education's Perth Regional Office and referred to as the Isolated Children Scheme. The range of allowances is set out below:

Boarding Allowances -
Basic - $350 per student
Additional - up to $350 per student
Supplementary for particular hardship
- up to $304 per secondary student
- up to $200 per primary student
Short-term - $10 per week per student
Correspondence Allowances -
Basic - up to $200 per student
Additional - up to $150 per student
Second Home Assistance -
Per student - up to $350

3.21 Boarding Allowances. The basic boarding allowance of $350 per student is paid when a student lives away from home to attend a school to study at a level not offered by a school within the prescribed distance of his or her home.* However, should the student be living away from home merely to study a course or subject not offered by the local school he would not normally be eligible for this allowance.
The additional boarding allowance of up to $350 per annum is paid to parents receiving the basic boarding allowance. Payment is subject to a means test and to actual boarding costs incurred. With an adjusted family income** of $5,300 or less the maximum entitlement is $350. The upper limit for adjusted family income is $6,975. Boarding costs in excess of the basic $350 allowance are reimbursed up to the amount of the determined maximum entitlement.

* See Appendix I for the definition of the prescribed distance.

** Details of the calculation of the adjusted family income may be obtained from the Australian Department of Education, Perth.

The special supplementary allowance of $304 per secondary student and $200 per primary student is paid when the adjusted family income is not above $2,100 per annum. The amounts paid reduce as the adjusted family income rises, ceasing at $4,025 for a primary student and $4,545 for a secondary student. The short-term allowance of $10 per week was introduced late in 1974. The purpose is to assist students to board away for short-term (between two weeks and one term) remedial treatment of an educational nature.

3.22 Correspondence Allowances. The basic allowance of $200 per student is paid once a year to the parents of eligible students. Conditions of eligibility are described in Appendix I but essentially the allowances are for students living at home and taking a full course of correspondence studies with a State Education Department Correspondence School. The purchase of textbooks, equipment, teaching aids as well as defraying travel costs are seen as likely uses by parents of the allowance. The additional payment of up to $150 per annum is made as reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred on:

(a) The employment of a governess or of domestic help to enable the mother to supervise lessons,

(b) accommodation costs associated with attendance at approved correspondence school camps and other activities by the student(s) and one parent,

(c) hire or purchase of a transceiver set licensed for school of the air purposes only.

3.23 Second Home Assistance. A family may run a second home specifically to enable their child or children to attend school on a daily basis. An allowance of $350 per child residing at such a home will be paid when one parent resides full-time in the permanent home.

3.24 Allowances Paid During 1973 and 1974. Information regarding the number of families receiving allowances provided by the Australian Department of Education is presented in Table X.

TABLE X

NUMBER OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN RECEIVING ASSISTANCE: 1973/74
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Name of Allowance	1973		1974 (at 28th Nov.)	
	Families	Children	Families	Children
Boarding Allowances -				
Basic - $350 per student	3328	4617	2699	3770
Additional - up to $350 per student	1234	1824	644	961
Supplementary for particular hardship				
- up to $304 per secondary student - up to $200 per primary student	189	253	51	73
Short term - $10 per week	-	-	-	-
Correspondence Allowances -				
Basic - up to $200 per student	212	342	74	177
Additional - up to $150 per student	74	121	31	61
Second Home Assistance -				
Per student - up to $350	-	-	58	101

The Table shows that in 1973, 212 families received the basic correspondence allowance on behalf of 342 children. However, Correspondence School enrolment figures for 1973 revealed that there were 519 children who would have qualified for this allowance. Perhaps as many as 100 additional families were entitled to receive the basic $200 grant. Comment is made later on the possible reasons for this shortfall.

Further, the marked reduction in the figures for 1974 is explained in part at least by the fact that many applications are not filed until the conclusion of the year. Enrolment figures presented later in this report indicate that there has not been a substantial decline in the number of Correspondence School students.

3.25 Scholarships. Of the three scholarships described below, only the first is awarded exclusively to correspondence students. The first two scholarships are funded by the State Government and the third by the Australian Government.

(a) Educational Endowment Scholarships for Primary Correspondence School Pupils

Each year, on the recommendation of the Headmaster of the Western Australian Correspondence School, two scholarships are made available to children who have completed the primary correspondence course. The academic achievement of the applicants is considered along with the financial needs of the family. Successful applicants receive $100 per annum for years 8, 9 and 10 of high school and $160 for years 11 and 12. During 1974 there was a total of 11 students receiving these allowances (four students received $160, seven received $100).

(b) Lower Secondary School Scholarships (District Superintendents' Recommendation)

Each year 150 scholarships are awarded to students who have completed year 7 in country primary schools and who would have to live away from home to continue their schooling. The value of the scholarships is $81 per year for the first three years of secondary school. Headmasters bring to the notice of their District Superintendent the names of likely candidates. District Superintendents make their recommendations which are confirmed by a three man board. Correspondence School pupils who are awarded an Education Endowment Scholarship as in (a) above are ineligible for these scholarships.

In 1974 there were 15 ex-students of the Western Australian Correspondence School in receipt of lower Secondary School Scholarships.

(c) Secondary Allowance Scheme

This Australian Government Scheme was introduced in 1974 to replace the Senior Secondary Scholarship Scheme. It was intended to assist families to maintain children at school for the final two years of secondary education.

The initial maximum value of $304 per annum will be increased to $450 in 1975. The actual value of the allowance is subject to a means test. When adjusted family income does not exceed $3,100, the full allowance is paid. No allowance is paid when the adjusted family income exceeds $4,545. This allowance is available to all full-time students actually attending school (thus excluding correspondence students) but is available to students who have studied by correspondence up to their final two years.

3.3 Indirect Financial Assistance

In addition to meeting the salaries of teachers, providing school accommodation and correspondence lesson materials, the Education Department of Western Australia and the Australian Department of Education finance certain facilities and services necessitated by the geographical isolation of some students. Parents do not receive cash (except as reimbursement of travel costs), but instead their children may utilise hostels, school of the air transceivers and travel between their home and an educational institution. Described below are the various types of such indirect assistance, all of which are financed by the general taxpayer.

3.31 Hostels. A hostel subsidy of $3 per week per child is paid by the State Government to most high school hostels to meet running expenses. The amount is increased to $4 at Esperance; $5 at Carnarvon and $6 at Port Hedland in order to meet the higher cost due to greater isolation. Maintenance costs of all high school hostels are borne by the State Government and are carried out by the Public Works Department. The State Government pays the interest charges on borrowings carried out by non-Government schools for student residential accommodation. The charges per student per term at each hostel are shown in Table XI.

TABLE XI

GOVERNMENT HOSTEL FEES

Centre	Cost Per Term
Albany	$225
Bunbury	$260
Carnarvon	$260
Port Hedland	$340
Esperance	$250
Moora	$300
Geraldton	$310
Katanning	$325
Merredin	$250
Narrogin	$325
Northam	$275

3.32 Travel. Since 1974, students who satisfy conditions of isolation set down by the Road and Air Transport Commission are eligible to receive three free return air fares per annum between their home and their residence while attending an educational institution. The Transport Commission defines an isolated child as one whose home is outside the area contained within the south-west land division and an area south of the 30°S. parallel and west of the 123°E. meridian. Applications are made through the school and must be forwarded to the Transport Commission one month prior to the date of travel. A voucher is returned which the student may present to any travel agent in exchange for the prescribed ticket. There is no age limit to this subsidy.

3.33 Transceivers. The Australian Government will fund the purchase of single-side band transceiver sets which are licensed for school of the air use only and are leased to parents by Parents and Citizens' Associations. Further details of this scheme are described later in this report.

3.34 Camp School Travel Assistance. There is a special subsidy scheme for children studying through a school of the air who attend camp schools. Travel expenses incurred by parents in bringing their children to pick-up points, by children travelling to and from the camp-site, and by parents collecting their children and returning home may all be claimed. When total claims exceed the allocated amounts indicated in Table XII, pro-rata payment is made.
Table XII shows how the amount of $4,000 was allocated through the five schools of the air for the 1972-73 financial year. The total allocation for the 1973-74 financial year was also $4,000.

TABLE XII

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR TRAVEL TO CAMP SCHOOLS

School of the Air	Amount Allocated 1972-73	Amount Spent 1972-73
Kimberley	$1,000	$1,000*
Port Hedland	1,000	139
Carnarvon	1,000	290
Meekatharra	500	500*
Kalgoorlie	500	500*
Total	$4,000	$2,429

* Amount claimed exceeded amount allocated.

3.4 Taxation and Direct Financial Assistance

The following points have been summarised from a Taxation Department leaflet entitled "Taxation Information Concerning the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme".

Benefits are not counted as taxable income for the parent who receives them. However the claims for the child as a dependant, or as a full-time student, are affected. The deduction for each student is reduced by the amount by which all boarding allowances (and any other income) for him exceed $130.

When claiming expenses incurred in connection with the full-time education of a child (maximum of $150; prior to 1974, $400) a taxpayer must reduce his claim by the amount of any correspondence or supplementary allowance received on behalf of that child.

3.5 Parents' View of Financial Assistance

3.51 Publicity. The Survey of Parents of Isolated Children revealed considerable discontent about the level of publicity given to the various forms of financial assistance which have been outlined. At least 20 per cent of parents surveyed were not aware of the range of financial allowances currently available. They indicated that they desired more information. Typical of comments by a number of parents was this statement:

> "As yet we have not applied for financial assistance or allowances as we did not know what was available or where to apply until we discussed it with our neighbours."

Another more poignant comment was:

> "I didn't know about it. I would like more details."

Altogether a total of 45 parents indicated that they would like more information about financial allowances.

Undoubtedly, much of this lack of knowledge of the range of direct financial assistance is due to the introduction of the new Australian Government allowances and the cessation of the State Government allowances.

The Australian Department of Education's Perth Regional Office publicises the allowances by means of newspaper advertisements and field visits. Publicity for 1975 consisted of advertisements placed in the *West Australian*, and *Pastoralists and Graziers Magazine* and the visit of an officer to the Kimberley area. Advertisements were placed in the *West Australian* on 12th December, 1974, 25th January, 1975 and the *News of the North* supplement to the *West Australian* on 11th December, 1974. Between 28th and 30th October, 1974 an officer of the Department visited Derby, Kununurra and Halls Creek, speaking to welfare officers, teachers, hostel managers and shire clerks.

Three constructive comments made by parents related to this question of effective communication. The first was that the Western Australian Correspondence School should assume responsibility for sending information sheets and application forms to parents of all correspondence pupils. Secondly, there should be a circular fully describing those items of expenditure for which reimbursement may be claimed under the additional correspondence allowance (up to $150 per student per year). Finally, a number of parents highlighted the continuing need for accurate information regarding the availability of scholarships.

3.52 Adequacy of Financial Assistance Schemes. Various comments by parents indicated a number of areas in which it was felt that improvements could be effected. For example, the method of payment was a cause of some problems:

> "The 1973 additional allowance was not paid until April 1974 and it cost us a considerable amount to pay an accountant to do our Tax Returns from 30th June, 1973 to 31st December, 1973."

Dissatisfaction with the boarding allowance means test, although not widespread, was clearly evident. The following extended comment reveals this:

> "The means test for special assistance is very poor. Why is it because we work so hard to keep what we own that we cannot receive the same financial assistance as others without a means test?
>
> To be in the high bracket income we have to teach our children for years and go without all modern living conditions such as education facilities, isolation, no television, poor electricity, and no transport except what we provide as well as high taxes. Andseparating families (i.e. sending children to boarding school or hostels) is hardest of all."

The Survey revealed that 22 families out of the 162 that responded had their claim reduced. Of these, 10 did not know why part of their claim was rejected. Among the reasons given for modifying claims were "not approved educational expenditure", "non-approved studies" and "governess was employed by the company".

Attention was drawn to the need for correspondence allowances to rise with the cost of living. Further, the actual cost of employing a governess or home help should be related to the level of financial assistance. Dissatisfaction with the taxation provisions relating to claims for dependants and educational expenses was expressed. The fact that many parents have no alternative but to send their children away to school was mentioned in support of a relaxation of these taxation rules.

Finally, not all of the critical comments advocated greater assistance:

> "We don't consider we need the financial assistance but we have used this amount in books etc. for our two children over the years. We live in an isolated area because we like it."

4. LEARNING IN ISOLATION - CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

4.1 Introduction

Children in geographically isolated families learn in a vastly different educational environment from most other Western Australian children. Obvious differences are the absence of a trained teacher and the fact that the child rarely leaves the home to attend a school. Further, it would be exceptional for two or more children of the same age to be learning together. Typical school resources such as special purpose rooms, equipment and books are rarely available. Frequently, there are younger or older siblings present when lessons are undertaken. Finally, the great reliance upon postal services for the receipt and despatch of lessons makes the experience of learning by correspondence rather different from that of most children.

These differences mean that the printed word becomes vital in the communication between teacher (correspondence tutor) and pupil, although this is augmented by radio communication and occasional camp schools. The educational supervision of the child in the home assumes great importance and is usually carried out by the mother. The following sections describe these aspects of correspondence education as it operates in Western Australia.

In the Survey, parents were given the opportunity to express their views on correspondence education and where appropriate, verbatim comments and statistical tables showing responses to particular questions have been used in this report. However, such views are usually restricted to comments on existing materials and methods since most parents are not familiar with a wide range of alternatives.

4.2 Subjects

The primary school subjects available through the Western Australian Correspondence School are reading, spelling, English, writing, mathematics, social studies, art and religious studies. The secondary school subjects are restricted to English, mathematics, social studies, science, art, health education, bookkeeping and commerce. The Correspondence School courses in these subjects have been approved by the Board of Secondary Education for Achievement Certificate purposes.

Each subject is divided into 20 sets of work. Students are required to forward their work to be marked each fortnight. The Survey revealed that parents were generally satisfied that their children were not expected to do too much work in each set. However, primary school mathematics drew some criticism in this respect. According to their parents, too much work was expected of children.

A certain amount of repetition and revision must be incorporated into lessons so that children do not forget skills and knowledge learned. A majority of parents (78 per cent) indicated that they felt that there was about the right amount of revision. Evidence from a number of teachers and parents suggested that it is quite a common practice for home supervisors to insist that students re-write all work which is submitted for marking.

A number of parents pointed out certain difficulties which their children encountered that made completion of work impossible. Absence of information and expertise in the home was cited most frequently. Obscure instructions were cited quite often. Inability to read and comprehend information provided in lessons and texts was also mentioned.

In answer to a question concerning the general quality of lessons, most parents considered that they were satisfactory. Table XIII shows the number of parents who responded to the various general descriptions of the lesson sheets.

TABLE XIII

PARENTS VIEW ON THE GENERAL QUALITY OF LESSON SHEETS (Numbers of parents who expressed each general view)

General View	Number of Parents	% of Response
Better than in the past	22	14%
Gradually improving	41	26%
Quality satisfactory	57	38%
Quality unchanged	8	5%
Quality needs improvement	27	17%
No response	7	-
Total	162	100%

Of particular interest in this Table are the 27 responses in the category "Quality needs improvement". A breakdown of these responses revealed which were the problem subjects.

Nine people referred specifically to primary mathematics, especially Year 2, where the common comment was "inconsistent processes". Other subjects requiring considerable improvement, in the view of some parents, were: reading books in early years, Year 6 social studies, art/creative writing (more coloured pictures), and English. Several parents commented that the lessons needed colour and better quality printing.

Parents were also asked whether there were any subjects which should be removed because there was no need for students to study them, or whether there were any subjects which they thought should be made available to correspondence school students. Table XIV sets out some of the suggestions.

TABLE XIV

PRIMARY SCHOOL SUBJECTS WHICH PARENTS WOULD:

(a) like to see included	(b) like to see removed
Sewing (5)*	Art (uninteresting)(3)
Science (19)	Bible Stories (5)
Nature Study (6)	Sewing (in present form) (13)
Handcrafts (10)	
Art instruction (5)	

* Number of parents who mentioned the subject.

4.3 Learning Methods and Media

4.31 Lesson Sheets. Communication of the teacher's instruction to the students is the essential purpose of lesson sheets. Teachers in daily face to face contact with their pupils convey instructions orally, by using blackboards and pin-up boards, and by using printed matter. Correspondence teachers do not have face to face contact with their pupils. Therefore the written word becomes of paramount importance. The lesson sheets of the Correspondence School have some shortcomings, not the least of which is their physical appearance.

The young child especially needs the visual stimulation of well drawn, colourful pictures. Some of the illustrations in the course work appear too small and detailed. This is particularly noticeable, for example, in the visual discrimination exercises (Year 1, Set 1, Reading).

Parents were asked to indicate their views about possible improvements of the physical appearance of lesson sheets. Table XV shows that there was considerable support for the use of colour (72 per cent), greater use of illustrations (91 per cent) and more use of photographs (76 per cent). There was much less support for a loose leaf format (36 per cent) and 64 per cent of respondents felt that higher quality paper in general was not worthwhile. However, a number of respondents indicated considerable dissatisfaction with the quality of particular lesson sheets which had been Gestetner duplicated at the Correspondence School.

TABLE XV

VIEWS ON POSSIBLE LESSON SHEET IMPROVEMENTS
(Percentage of families responding)

Proposal	Worthwhile	Not Worthwhile	No Opinion	Total
Use of colour	72%	24%	4%	100%
Greater use of illustrations	91%	8%	1%	100%
Loose leaf format	36%	46%	18%	100%
Higher quality paper	27%	64%	9%	100%
More use of photographs	76%	13%	11%	100%

4.32 Return of Lesson Sheets. Most teachers would agree that the prompt return of marked lessons to students is an important part of the teaching process. In the correspondence situation the time taken for completed lesson papers to be sent to Perth (from home students) or school of the air for correction and return varies between 7 and 28 days and appears to be longer for those students on correspondence only. The two relevant variables are the time taken for mails and the time needed by correspondence teachers to evaluate lesson papers.

Table XVI indicates in detail the responses of parents to the question seeking information about the time taken for return of completed lesson papers.

TABLE XVI

TIME FOR RETURN OF COMPLETED LESSON PAPERS ACCORDING TO METHOD OF SCHOOLING
(Percentage of families responding)

Lesson Return Time	Method of Schooling	
	Correspondence Only	School of the Air
7 days	37%	35%
8-14 days	31%	45%
15-21 days	17%	20%
22-28 days	15%	-
Total	100%	100%

4.33 Analysis of Selected Lesson Sheets: Year 1*. There is a wide variety in the speed and efficiency with which neuro-muscular control is acquired. Thus some children by the age of five have fine hand control and can cut out with scissors, and draw circles and straight lines with ease. However many are slower in developing these skills and as a general rule one would not expect a new Year 1 child to have very fine control of a pencil or crayon. Thus some of the requirements in the Year 1 course are beyond the capability of many children, for examples, Set 2, Mary Mary and Set 7, number rhymes. Since no allowance is made for the child's level of motor skill (that is, large hand and arm movements), the fine delicate work required to fill in the outlines would be frustrating and difficult for many children when they lack the necessary control for this kind of work.

* This is an example of the analysis which may be needed in order to ensure parity between modern practices in schools and the quality of correspondence lessons.

The young child is essentially egocentric and his interest and awareness progress in an ever widening circle from himself, to his family, the home, the immediate community, and finally to the wider local environment and beyond. Bearing this in mind, all early teaching material should be relevant to the child's own experience ("begin where you are") and the child's learning progresses from the known and familiar, in a series of carefully graded steps, to the unknown, wider fields of knowledge that may be theoretical and *far removed* from his immediate experience. In some cases the correspondence course Year 1 lesson sheets appear to employ material of doubtful value, that is, nursery rhymes, stories, pictures and a reading scheme (The Happy Venture Readers) which take no account of the special educational environment of a child living on an isolated property. Much of this material seems outdated and this reading scheme has been criticized by teachers both in Europe and Australia for its lack of relevance in both language and content to the lives and experience of the average *urban* child let alone the Australian *rural* child. In Australia this reading scheme is being replaced in many schools by 'Endeavour Readers' which is of Australian origin and more suited to the needs of Australian Children. The 'Breakthrough to Literacy' scheme is also becoming popular because it is based on the child's own vocabulary.

4.34 Texts. Lesson sheets are written with reference to texts that are similar to those in use in schools throughout the State. A large number of these have been written by Curriculum Branch staff and published by the Western Australian Government Printer. Most are issued free of charge to students. A small number of texts are purchased by the Western Australian Correspondence School from commercial publishers. Primary school reading texts are generally issued on loan to students.

4.35 Audio-Visual Learning Aids. The growing interest in audio-visual learning aids for isolated children was reflected by an article in the *West Australian* of 1st August, 1974 entitled "Study aids for remote areas", (page 34). Plans were announced by the Minister for Education, Mr G.C. MacKinnon, to begin the gradual introduction in 1975 of projectors and tape recorder/players to add variety to studies. The major problem envisaged was that of devising slides and tapes for many subjects at a variety of levels. Further, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association Federal Policy (April 1973) Clause 15(c) states: "That the Federal Executive present a submission to the Federal Minister for the Media requesting the launching of a satellite for the purpose of television and the reservation of one channel specifically for the purpose of educating children in isolated areas".

The Survey revealed that quite a large number of families already possessed articles of audio-visual equipment. By far the most commonly owned item was a medium/short wave radio receiver (66 per cent of families responding). Forty three per cent of families owned a cassette recorder/player and 23 per cent owned a slide projector, both of which were the most commonly utilised aids. Interestingly, 18 per cent of families own movie projectors and 14 per cent own television receivers.

Parents were asked to indicate the nature of their electrical power supply. Table XVII indicates that 12 per cent had no electrical power and that 57 per cent had 240 Volt A.C. available. The planning implication of this data is that care must be exercised if families are to be issued with audio-visual hardware and other sophisticated learning aids.

TABLE XVII

AVAILABILITY OF ELECTRICAL POWER

Type of Power	Number of Families	% of Response
240 V - A.C. - own generator	65	51%
240 V - A.C. - mains supplied	8	6%
32 V - D.C.	35	27%
Other	5	4%
None (would require batteries)	15	12%
No response	34	-
Total	162	100%

During 1973, the Audio-Visual Education Branch, in collaboration with the Correspondence School and the School of the Air at Meekatharra conducted a pilot scheme to make a wider range of resources available to isolated children. This project involved the preparation of slides, film strips, audio tapes and work sheets. The first round of materials was well received but the extent of preparation required to run a full scale audio-visual programme for these children became evident. Two parents in the pilot scheme commented:

> "We have been sent a cassette and film projector which we thought would make school more interesting this year. However, we have received nothing to put on the cassette and three very short films for the projector."

> "I feel these would be a great asset if we could get material to put them to use. It could be sent around to say a group of close children if it cost too much for films and tapes for all at the same time."

Until adequate audio-visual learning materials have been prepared and integrated with existing learning materials (e.g. correspondence lesson notes, Curriculum Branch workbooks, stimulus books etc.), the widespread supply of audio-visual hardware appears premature.

The Survey asked those families who did not own a tape recorder/player and/or a film strip/slide projector to indicate their preferences regarding the purchase or hire of this equipment. Of those families who did not own a cassette record/player, 32 preferred to purchase, and 18 preferred to hire a set. There were 11 families who neither wanted to purchase nor hire a set. Of those families who did not own a film strip/slide projector, 46 preferred to purchase and 44 preferred to hire a set. There were 17 families who neither wanted to purchase nor hire a set.

The possibility of using tape recordings as an alternative means of communication between tutors and students was raised in the Survey. Ninety per cent of families responding indicated support for the idea whilst the ten per cent who were opposed were mostly enrolled with a school of the air. An apparent disadvantage of such a potentially useful scheme would be the time required for staff to listen to the children's comments. In some subjects the time spent on audio-visual aids must be limited since audio-visual aids can only be supplementary to the main courses in each subject.

4.36 Australian Broadcasting Commission: Correspondence School of the Air. Between 9.20 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. each morning, a member of the staff of the Western Australian Correspondence School broadcasts to all correspondence students over the Third Network (Regional and Short-Wave Stations) A.B.C. radio stations. The list of these stations reveals that a wide coverage of the State has been achieved: 6AL (Albany), 6BE (Broome), 6BS (Bunbury), 6CA (Carnarvon), 6DL (Dalwallinu), 6DB (Derby), 6EP (Esperance), 6XM (Exmouth), 6GN (Geraldton), 6GF (Kalgoorlie), 6KW (Kununurra), 6NM (Northam), 6PH (Port Hedland), 6WA (Wagin), and 6WH (Wyndham). In addition, the two short-wave stations VLW and VLX broadcast these programmes.

Programmes are taped in advance of being broadcast, and sometimes include participating students from Perth schools. Monday's programme is directed to Year 2 and 3 students, Tuesday to Year 1, Wednesday to Years 4 and 5, Thursday to Years 6 and 7, and Friday to Years 8 and 9. Lessons deal with most subjects taught by the Correspondence School and are based upon the actual work set in correspondence assignments.

In addition, all A.B.C. school broadcasts are transmitted over the Third Network. These sessions are comprehensive and deal with many school subjects. They are primarily supplementary to the normal work of students.

In the Survey, there were 32 families out of 162 who never listened to these broadcasts. Two families did not own a radio; 16 families owned a radio but could not receive the broadcasts presumably because of distance and interference; three families did not know about the broadcasts; and eight families did not consider the broadcasts useful. Three families gave some other reason for not listening. Of the families who do listen to the broadcasts about 67 per cent have good or usually good reception; about 90 per cent find the broadcasts useful and interesting, and about 41 per cent would like more broadcasts.

4.4 Supervision in the Home

4.41 Supervisors. Just as the quality of the education of a child in a conventional school depends to a large extent on the teacher, so the education of an isolated child depends on the quality of the supervisor. The Survey revealed that 75 per cent of supervisors are the mothers of the children they supervise. Sixteen per cent of responding families employed a governess (25 governesses), and in one per cent of cases the father acted as supervisor. The remaining families had some other arrangement (for example, an older sister).

A factor which has been persistently overlooked when considering the education of isolated children, is that the mother/child - teacher/pupil relationship is potentially an ideal learning situation. This potential is not always realised. The parent/teacher does not always have either the specialised knowledge or confidence in her own ability to take full advantage of the one-to-one teaching situation.

The educational qualifications of supervisors vary considerably. With respect to the general level of education achieved, Table XVIII indicates that there was a range from primary school to tertiary studies, with most supervisors having completed up to three years of secondary school.

TABLE XVIII

LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF SUPERVISORS

Level of Education	No. of Supervisors	% of Response
Completed primary school	17	12%
1-3 years secondary school	61	42%
4-5 years secondary school	41	28%
Apprenticeship, nursing etc.	12	8%
Tertiary studies	15	10%
No response	16	-
Total	162	100%

Of these supervisors, only 13 per cent had undergone teacher training.

The survey also revealed that in 22 per cent of the families responding, a person was employed to carry out housework so that the mother was able to supervise the children's learning.

4.42 Duties of Supervisors. A booklet entitled *A Guide for the Supervisor* is distributed by the Correspondence School. The book indicates certain procedures which supervisors are expected to follow. It says that the prime aim of the supervisor should be to establish and maintain a "school atmosphere" in the room used for school work. For example: "From the beginning he (the child) must learn to obey the supervisor's commands promptly". A timetable should be adhered to when possible. Children should spend *exactly ten school days* working on each set and the supervisor is to ensure that the child does *not finish work early*. Supervisors *must* closely direct the work of pupils in the lower primary school year who are not able to read lesson sheets. A high standard of legibility must be maintained. With each set of completed lessons the supervisor must forward a written report on the work of the child during the fortnight. Despatch of lessons is also the responsibility of the supervisor as is the correction by the child of lessons returned after marking by the teacher.

Many teachers in schools today would argue that these principles are too restrictive and not in keeping with modern educational trends.

Plans are in hand to revise this booklet keeping in mind the present objective of treating each child as an individual.

4.43 Difficulties. Many parents in responding to the Survey indicated that there was much emotional strain associated with the supervision of their children's lessons. For example -

> "The worst aspect is the mother having to teach her own child. It is hard to be a mother and teacher of school as well. Emotional pressures are high with both mother and child becoming exhausted by the constant pressure of work. A <u>trained</u> governess would be much more suitable if you could afford it - but unfortunately most of us can't."

Another mother pointed out that she had her own work to attend to and that correspondence lessons just added to an already long day!

> "Because of financial reasons we can neither employ a governess nor help in the house therefore I do have difficulty at times 'fitting things in'".

Knowing how a child compares with other children of the same age was considered important by a number of parents:

> "It is very hard for a mother to judge her child's ability. She is either too hard in criticism or the other extreme."

> "I think my biggest problem is that I just do not know what to expect from the children - when to give them extra help and when to insist they cope on their own; what to do when a child cannot think of anything to write in a composition that has to be sent in."

Despite these comments the mother should not have to make all judgments on her own. It is the function of the correspondence teacher to keep her advised regularly regarding the child's progress.

Supervisors occasionally suspect that a child is in need of remedial work in a particular area but because they lack expertise, anxiety may be experienced by all concerned regarding the proper course of action.

Finally, the Survey revealed that the supervisors who have not undergone teacher training experience more difficulty in helping students complete their work than do those who have had teacher training.

4.44 Proposed Solutions. The Survey indicated that parents had a definite preference for particular suggested improvements to improve the general quality of supervision in the home.

Set out below in *Table XIX is a summary* of responses.

TABLE XIX

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO HELP SUPERVISORS

Suggested Improvements	% of Response
More financial assistance to enable employment of a trained governess	33%
Visits by advisory teachers to help supervisors	28%
Training courses for supervisors	16%
Better lesson instructions	8%
More schools of the air	8%
Other	7%
Total	100%

As mentioned in Section 3.52 many parents expressed concern that they were unable to employ a trained governess because of financial limitations. Table XIX clearly reinforces this evidence by indicating that one third of families viewed this as the most crucial improvement which might be introduced. A further comment confirms this:

> "Generally speaking, governesses are difficult to obtain (suitable types especially) and this problem may be overcome by provision of greater financial assistance, thus permitting higher wages to be paid."

The re-introduction of visits by advisory teachers to help supervisors was supported by 28 per cent of parents. The appointment of itinerant teachers ceased in 1967 with the establishment of the final school of the air. The view of the Education Department at this time was that the service was inadequate and expensive and that the schools of the air were a far more satisfactory solution. Further, the expense involved in visiting the 200 (approximately) students not enrolled with a school of the air would be prohibitive - at least five teachers and vehicles would have been needed. The use of air travel, while reducing the number of staff required, was considered impractical because of the expense involved.

Despite these difficulties, many parents voiced strong support for the re-establishment of a scheme enabling a teacher to visit all families at least once during the year. Two comments from parents point out a number of distinct advantages:

> "It is essential to introduce visits by advisory teachers. Mothers/supervisors simply have no encouragement in their jobs as supervisors. A few spoken words by a trained teacher/advisor during an at least twice yearly visit would solve many individual problems and give us some incentive".

> "I think an itinerant teacher should visit each home at least once each term to be able to spend at least two days on each visit. Besides checking work and advising the supervisor he should also teach the child crafts and perhaps show educational films at night."

As a variation to the itinerant teacher scheme, but on the same theme that children need personal contact with their teachers and classmates, some parents advocated visits by school of the air teachers. The following extensive comment describes how this might be accomplished:

> "A visiting advisory teacher would be helpful. However, <u>most</u> helpful would be a visit from the child's own school of the air teacher. This could be managed (I think) at least once a year (preferably early in second term) if a relieving teacher was available to take over at the wireless base. It would be of tremendous value to the child and supervisor if the on-air teacher could visit for several days and I am sure the teacher would find the experience both informative and interesting. I think the on-air teachers must find it difficult to get an accurate idea of the child's abilities from the fortnightly test papers alone and likewise it is difficult to find constructive criticism in their reports. Encouraging yes, but rarely constructive".

The need for increased contact in all possible ways between children and their teachers was highlighted by a Correspondence School teacher:

> "Station visits, to allow teachers to see the child in his own environment, to meet the parents and to assist with their many problems, are important. In my experience, establishing personal contact with the child and the parent has led to far more effective teaching. Knowing the child allows the teacher to relate lessons to the child's own experience. Far greater co-operation has been found once the parents know the teacher and feel they can ask questions and bring up problems that tend to be magnified by isolation."

4.5 Camp Schools

The social development of children has been emphasised to a greater degree in recent years. For example, in an article entitled "*The Philosophy of the Primary Division*", the present Director of Primary Education (S.R. Palmer) stated that too much emphasis had been placed in the past upon subject content and syllabus coverage (Education, 1973, 22(2), 3-11). Palmer quotes the statement of Aims for Australian Education outlined by the Australian Council of State School Organisations. Points 5, 6 and 7 quoted below, are cited in a list of the most important behavioural outcomes with which primary education should be concerned:

"(5) Social skills.

(a) Ability to make friends.
(b) Ability to work with others.
(c) Ability to compete with others.
(d) Ability to learn from others.
(e) Ability to exert an influence on others.
(f) Respect for the rights and feelings of others.
(g) The acquisition of a natural and acceptable standard of behaviour.

(6) Acquisition of *worth-while cultural interests* which produce critical and intelligent pursuits or appreciations. In the normal school programme teachers endeavour to stimulate cultural activity in sport, art, craft, music, literature and drama and school club activities. The Department would not wish to restrict the school's area of stimulation to cultural activities normally associated with the school programme.

(7) *Moral Growth.* Education is either good or bad according to the way in which the educated person uses his knowledge and skills. It is of the highest importance that the learning experiences should produce something more than an efficient and well-instructed student. We are aiming at producing an effective, well-adjusted and responsible member of our society.

It is therefore contended that the skill in teaching lies not so much in covering the educational content in each subject syllabus with clarity and efficiency but in selecting an organized sequence of learning experiences which will produce a more effective, reliable and creative person."

For children learning in isolation formal opportunities to develop these abilities are limited to attendance at camp schools. Presently, camp schools are organised by the teachers at the five schools of the air. They are generally held only once per year, although there is no reason why they could not be held more regularly, except that the amount allocated to reimbursement of travel expenses is limited. During 1974, Kalgoorlie and Meekatharra Schools of the Air held a joint camp at Point Walter in Perth, and Derby, Port Hedland and Carnarvon Schools of the Air organised individual local camps. Both schools of the air and home students are invited to attend these camps. Despite this, the survey showed that 55 per cent of school of the air students attended a camp school during 1973, but only 18 per cent of home students. The number of schools of the air teachers allocated to each camp depends upon the number of students who attend. In the case of camps held in Perth, teachers from the Western Australian Correspondence School are encouraged to visit and meet students. A number do so, but they are not specifically involved in the organisation of activities for the students. Camps are not organised for secondary correspondence pupils.

Parents clearly recognise the great value of the camps as the following comments indicate:

> "Children need the social contact with other children, especially those who will be attending boarding schools later. Many parents are unaware of the adjustments their children will need to make in living and working with other children. The social needs of children at camp schools are in my opinion by far the most important. Parents and children need to be encouraged to see what a worthwhile experience camp schools can be, and the camps designed to cater especially for their special needs."

> "Helps them to adjust socially to other children."

> "They learn to mix, work in classroom atmosphere and manage without parents."

5. THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

5.1 Introduction: A Brief History of the School

The prime source of information about the development of the Western Australian Correspondence School from its beginning in 1918 is the booklet written by the school's first and longest serving Headmaster, Mr Clarence Eakins. Appointed Headmaster in May 1920, Eakins held this position until his retirement in December 1951. Published in June 1964, his book entitled *The W.A. Correspondence School, Perth, Its Pioneer Years* consists of 88 mimeographed pages.

According to Eakins (1964, p.5) the first correspondence lessons given were to teacher/monitors employed in country schools during 1903, but this was discontinued by 1907. During 1918, under the auspices of Mr Senior Inspector J.A. Miles, the first outback children were enrolled to receive correspondence lessons. Mr Miles continued as Superintendent of the Correspondence School until his retirement in 1935.

Early enrolments came from an area bounded by Eucla, Busselton and Port Hedland. The farming areas of the Great Southern and South Western districts were particularly well represented (Eakins, 1964, p.12). Many appreciative letters from parents attested to the effectiveness of the way in which the educational needs of isolated families were being met. In 1922, practical courses in farm bookkeeping, practical mensuration and home economics were introduced and met with immediate success.

Eakins identifies the period 1923-1931 as a period of rapid expansion in enrolments, particularly of "outback" students for whom school was established. The 1923 enrolment of 783 had increased to 2,148 by the end of 1931. In addition there were other categories of enrolment. Country boys and girls over the compulsory age who had left school but wished to continue their studies in a few subjects were accepted in 1923 and by 1931 numbered 115. Children in small country schools who wished to study at post-primary level were also accepted in 1923. A general two year course for these students was devised, and in 1926 courses were prepared enabling children to study for the Junior Certificate Examination. By 1931 there were 53 Junior Certificate pupils and about 1,250 General Course pupils in more than 500 schools (Eakins, 1964, p.23).

The peak enrolment in peacetime* of outback primary students occurred in 1933 when 2,152 pupils received lessons. The ensuing decline in the size of this group is attributed to the provision of transport facilities in connection with the consolidation of schools (Eakins, 1964, p.26). Interestingly in view of the current location of correspondence pupils, described in Chapter 2 of this report, most of these lived in the newly-established areas of the wheat belt. Many others lived in the south-west corner of the State in group settlement and timber workers' camps.

The increasing importance of the Junior Certificate group necessitated the revision of old lessons and production of new courses. Carrying these tasks out during the Depression years proved difficult and was not completed until 1937. By that time there were about 300 such students.

In 1930, examples of needlework and handwork were included in the Correspondence School display at the Royal Show. By 1938 papers on needle-work were used for the first time and in 1947 a teacher to assist with this subject was appointed to the school. Girls in small rural schools were also permitted to enrol for this subject in 1947 and by 1950 there were 324 such enrolments.

Educational camps in Perth began in 1926 when 25 boys were billeted in private homes for 10 days in order that a carefully planned series of visits to places of significance could be arranged. Staff members from the school accompanied students. Other equally successful camps were held in subsequent years.

Between May 1926 and 1945 the Correspondence School produced a magazine entitled *Our Rural Magazine*. Its circulation by 1935 was 10,000 and recipients included both State and private school students. Containing a wide variety of interesting articles written in many cases by experts, this monthly magazine served to alleviate the geographic and social isolation of many children. Its discontinuation in 1945 was due to a paper shortage and in its place a few years later came the rather different *W.A. School Paper* intended for general circulation amongst schools. The Correspondence School then introduced a *Quarterly Circular* which was little more than an information sheet.

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* The 1942 enrolment was higher due to the temporary evacuation of metropolitan children to the country.

Physically handicapped and invalid children in the metropolitan area were first assisted by the provision of correspondence papers in 1939. However, with the introduction of improved transport facilities and special schools for such children, enrolments declined and the 1955 Annual Report reveals no students in this category.

In 1940 Correspondence School radio broadcasts were introduced to supplement the general school broadcasts of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Frequently, these took the form of a talk designed to elucidate a general broadcast. Others formed almost complete units in themselves, supported with broadcast leaflets supplied in advance.

Eakins (1964, p.62) identifies the period 1944 to 1946 as a turning point in enrolment trends. During these two years the school lost 267 outback pupils and gained 81 post-primary pupils in large country schools and 213 adult students. The graph indicates an ever-widening gap between the number of home pupils for whom the school was originally established, and the total number of enrolments.

The loss of pupils in the former group is attributed to the consolidation of country schools brought about by means of school bus services (Eakins, 1964, p.63). Commencing in 1930, these services numbered 438 by 1951-52 and 659 in 1973. The introduction in 1946 of a living-away-from-home allowance further exacerbated this attrition. Free air trips for children from homes north of the 26th parallel sent south to school were introduced in 1947 and had a similar influence upon enrolments.

On the other hand, secondary students taking correspondence lessons at primary schools increased in number to reach 663 by 1951. Adult students preparing for the Nurses' Entrance Examination, Police Academy and other positions requiring improved educational qualifications became an increasingly important group and in the following years swelled numbers considerably.

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In 1946 a major innovation occurred with the appointment to the Gascoyne-Manilya area of an itinerant teacher. The duties of this teacher were to pay several short visits each year to the homes of all correspondence children within the area to assist them and their parents. The success of this experiment led to the appointment in 1949 and 1951 of additional teachers to serve the northern areas. Because of the great distances traversed, up to a quarter of the teacher's time was spent travelling. A fully equipped vehicle was provided. On average, visits lasted three days and were made at least twice per year to each family. The itinerant teacher consulted with the child's correspondence teacher in Perth prior to making the visit and made a report at the conclusion of the visit. Essentially the itinerant teacher quickly analysed the areas in which the child could be helped, and also arranged a variety of experiences such as with art and crafts materials which the child would not normally encounter. Assistance to the supervisor was also willingly given and was considered to be an equally valuable service. The last position for an itinerant teacher lapsed in 1967 when the final school of the air was established. This means that approximately half of the outback students have no personal contact with a teacher. The expense of the itinerant teacher scheme is given as the main reason for its discontinuation.

The *Education Circular* of November, 1952 officially announced that the title Correspondence Classes had been changed to Western Australian Correspondence School. At this time, the school was located at 9 Museum Street, Perth, where it had been since 1947. Presently the school is located in Thomas Street, Subiaco and has been there since 1958. Since 1918 when the Correspondence Classes were first established and located within a room at the Education Department they have been located on several sites including the old Treasury Buildings and Claremont Teachers' College. At no time has the school occupied a building specifically designed to meet the needs of the staff and to facilitate the provision of educational services to isolated children.

Figure 3 and Table XX which follow give some of the enrolment details of the Western Australian Correspondence School since 1918.

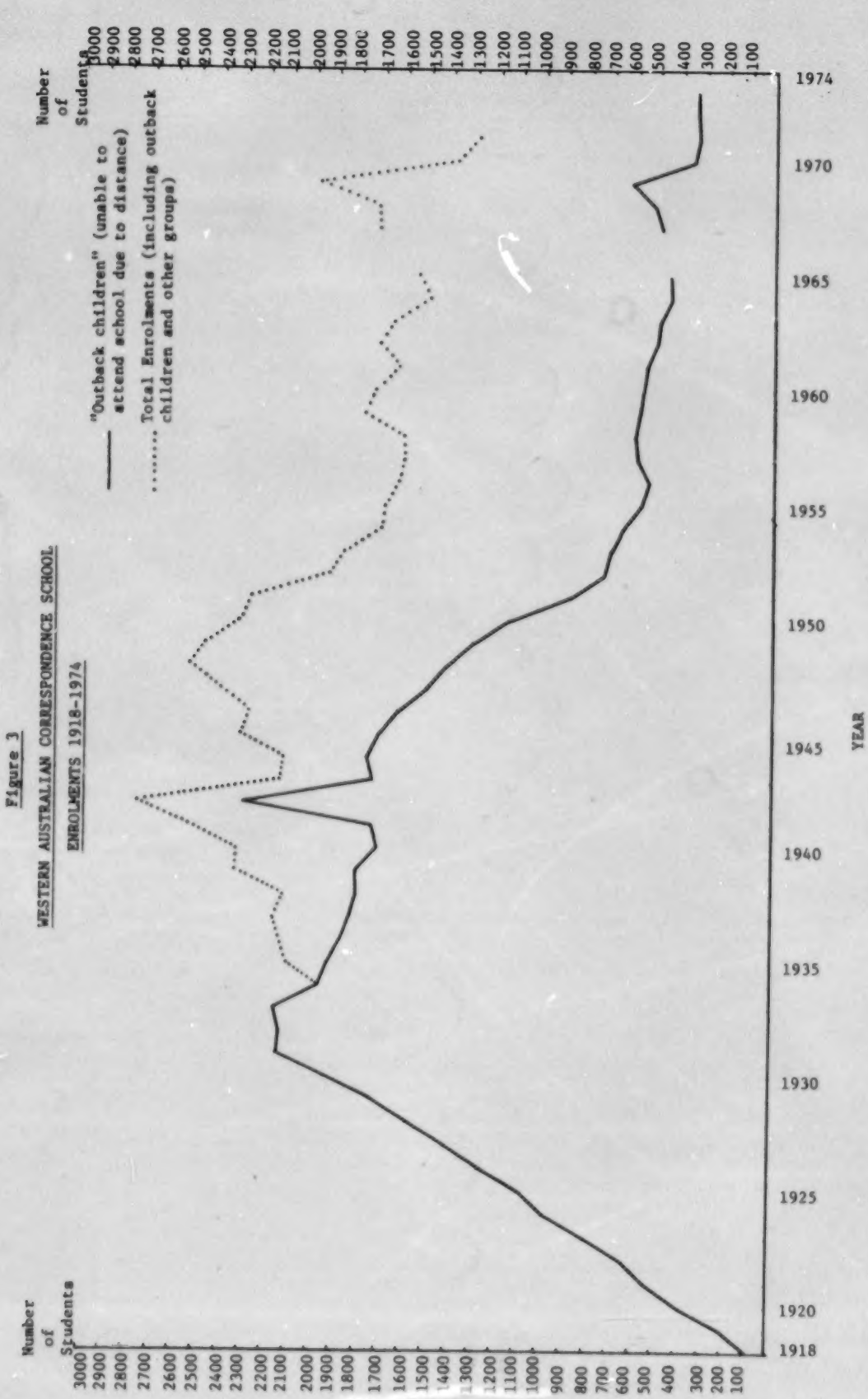

Figure 3

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

ENROLMENTS 1918-1974

TABLE XX

W.A. CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL - ENROLMENT BY TYPE OF STUDENT 1951-1973
(Data from Annual Report)

Type of Student	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Group 1	879	747	718	653	572	546	598	608	586	570	552
Group 2	43	43	42	39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Group 3	256	134	83	76	92	85	86	73	90	119	94
Group 4	407	497	590	591	591	498	346	407	439	354	325
Group 5	297	209	125	120	108	105	180	120	253	283	276
Group 6	380	320	310	278	325	405	390	385	398	400	382
Group 7	-	-	-	-	4	7	9	19	16	16	13
Total	2262	1950	1868	1757	1692	1646	1609	1612	1782	1742	1642

Type of Student	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Group 1	510	500	450	454	na*	497	522	638	354	333	347	348
Group 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Group 3	84	40	28	35	na	42	33	40	42	35	24	21
Group 4	201	200	152	150	na	215	208	162	166	142	86	54
Group 5	260	274	224	263	na	260	238	247	216	193	104	139
Group 6	656	629	617	628	na	676	699	870	564	568	621	613
Group 7	15	15	26	24	na	31	29	37	46	25	na	na
Total	1726	1658	1497	1554	na	1721	1729	1994	1388	1296	na	na

Groups

Group 1 Outback pupils - "home" students
Group 2 Crippled children in metropolitan area
Group 3 Post-primary children in one teacher schools
Group 4 Post-primary children in larger rural schools taking special subjects
Group 5 Needlework and dressmaking
Group 6 Adult students
Group 7 Overseas students

* na Not available

5.2 Administration and Staffing

5.21 Classification of the School. The Education Department of Western Australia *Regulations* do not explicitly classify the Western Australian Correspondence School. However the school is controlled by the Director of Primary Education and would thus be designated as a primary school, though the appointment of the Headmaster of the Correspondence School does not occur as part of the normal promotional system of primary schools, and thus the school appears to be classified as a special school since both primary and secondary students are enrolled.

5.22 Appointment of Headmasters. When the position of Headmaster falls vacant, an advertisement is placed in the *Education Circular* stating the duties, qualifications and experience required for an applicant to be successful. In the advertisement which appeared on page 34 of the *Education Circular*, December 1973, the duties of the headmaster were described.

> "To be responsible for the organization of correspondence courses for primary and secondary students and for some post-school courses as required.
>
> To supervise the preparation of lesson material.
>
> To liaise with parents.
>
> To supervise conduct of the school of the air.
>
> Such other duties as may be required by the Director of Primary Education.
>
> Qualifications and Experience
>
> Applicants should possess a university degree or its equivalent, together with the Teachers' Higher Certificate.
>
> An applicant should be a senior headmaster with both primary and secondary experience."

The recommended applicant is subject to appeal by unsuccessful applicants before the Teachers' Tribunal.

5.23 Professional Staff. At the 1st August, 1974 39 teachers made up the professional staff of the Western Australian Correspondence School.

Table XXI indicates the variety of duties in which these teachers were engaged.

TABLE XXI

W.A. CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL - DUTIES OF TEACHING STAFF - 1ST AUGUST, 1974

Duties	Number of Staff
Administration	
Headmaster	1
Deputy Headmaster (Secondary)	1
First Mistress (Primary)	1
Storemen	2
Primary	
Home students	5
Writing	2
Home students and other duties	1
Needlework	1
Secondary	
Home students	8
Home and school students	6
Police course	6
Home students and other duties	3
Writing	1
Extended sick leave	1
Total	39

Many of the Correspondence School staff are engaged in curriculum development tasks associated with the revision of lesson sheets and the construction of new courses. Their effectiveness in this task is in part dependent upon their having had recent relevant classroom experience. This is essential if they are to be in a position to ensure that lessons are equal to the best practices currently in use in schools. A corollary of this is that relatively short-term appointments for most staff would guarantee a reasonable turnover of staff and facilitate the infusion of vital new ideas. At least one parent was aware of the need for such a system of staff appointment:

"May I suggest that the Correspondence School needs a small band of up-to-date young, thinking, specialised teachers. They should have the many remedial branches already available at their finger-tips and be prepared to use them. The need to be able to meet the pupils in their home environment. Advice should be given to parents of different approaches to lessons."

Currently 59 per cent of staff have been at the School for more than five years. At least two of the present staff have been at the School for more than 20 years. Table XXII presents the complete details of this aspect of staffing policy.

TABLE XXII

W.A. CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL STAFF: NUMBER OF YEARS OF APPOINTMENT
(Excluding school of the air teachers)

Years since initial appointment at W.A. Correspondence School	Number of Staff	% of staff
Less than 1 year	5	13%
1-2 years	5	13%
3-5 years	6	15%
5-10 years	12	31%
More than 10 years	11	28%
Total	39	100%

It is the present policy to attract writers who have had immediate prior relevant classroom experience for short term (say two years) assignments.

5.3 Accommodation

Dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the accommodation currently occupied by the staff of the Correspondence School has been highlighted during 1974. Originally designed as a junior primary school the Thomas Street premises are inadequate. A Public Works Department report mentioned four specific defects: the urgent need for individual, properly designed work areas for all teachers; a new room for the primary sewing teacher a new storage room to enable the staff room to be used as such; and re-location of the entrance to the female toilet, currently via the staff room.

Three solutions were proposed:

i. the modification and extension of the existing premises to better serve the needs of the school;

ii. the demolition of the existing building and the re-erection of a Correspondence School of equal area to the extended school envisaged in i. above, allowing for a more economic site utilisation, flexibility of use and the possibility of future vertical extensions;

iii. the modification of a larger disused metropolitan primary school better suited to the purposes of the school.

At the time of writing, cost estimates are being prepared on these proposals.

5.4 Western Australian Correspondence School Library

School libraries in general are becoming more sophisticated and in some cases are regarded as resource centres which provide not only books but also audio-visual learning facilities. The library at the Correspondence School has to fill two important roles. It is a vital source of books for students and it is a resource centre for correspondence tutors. It needs special facilities for despatch and return of books and increasingly it will need facilities for staff to prepare and use audio-visual materials. Currently the library at the Correspondence School appears to require upgrading as the following comment from the Headmaster substantiates.

> "The library here is of even greater importance than in other schools and needs a special financial grant to upgrade the quantity and quality of books. A trained or partly trained librarian is also highly desirable, or at the very least, a teacher should be helped to obtain real library skills and qualifications to run this vital component to our school."

In addition, a sound-proofed room and audio-visual technician would be essential to enable the effective introduction of audio-visual media into lessons. It is anticipated that 1975 will see the introduction of these features.

Responses from parents indicated that widespread use was made of the library and that most parents were satisfied with the number of books available, their suitability, the time taken to receive them, and the time allowed for the loan. Many parents also used school of the air libraries, local shire council libraries and a travelling library.

5.5 Course Development

5.51 Writing. Eakins (1964, p.26) has described a number of qualifications he considered necessary to secure the highest degree of efficiency in the writing of correspondence lessons. These were:

> "i. a thorough knowledge of the subject to be taught;
>
> ii. experience in marking papers worked by correspondence pupils;
>
> iii. ability to express himself or herself simply, clearly and to the point in language suited to the age level of the pupils; and
>
> iv. a liking for this type of work, and ability to develop a helpful study technique."

Teachers on the staff of the Correspondence School are charged with the responsibility of writing and revising lessons but there are certain difficulties evident in this arrangement. Teachers selected to write courses must continue with their correspondence teaching duties and consequently the added pressure tends to reduce the effectiveness with which both tasks are executed.

The working conditions inhibit the rate of progress of writers. Furthermore, because of the location of the Correspondence School liaison with Departmental specialist branches is not facilitated (for example, there is only a single inward/outward telephone line). Finally there is difficulty in obtaining knowledge of the widely differing circumstances in which students utilise these course, and of reconciling these when writing.

Recognising the magnitude of these problems, the Headmaster has made this statement of a desirable solution:

> "Neither the contracting out to outside teachers for the writing of papers, nor the complete writing by teachers of this staff is really satisfactory. This could mean that teachers with no real comprehension of the problems of isolated children and their supervisors, or teachers whose contact with classroom children is very remote, would be undertaking this major responsibility. I believe that selected teachers should be on short term appointments here (two or three years maximum) to work as a correspondence tutor for about six months and then write papers. This is our major responsibility in many ways, and only the best should be accepted."

A further possibility may be the operation of course writing teams which would plan, write, edit and arrange the printing of new courses.

5.52 Publishing. The Western Australian Government Printer is responsible for the printing of most lesson materials. However, there are elementary duplicating facilities available at the Correspondence School for the purpose of preparing circularised letters and notices and some lesson sheets. Table XV in Chapter 4 indicates that most parents surveyed considered that there were a number of worthwhile improvements which could be made to the appearance of lesson sheets. This observation should not reflect upon the ability of the Government Printer to produce printed matter equal to that of the highest quality commercial printers. The most likely explanation is that the relatively small number of correspondence students has not warranted more expensive production techniques. To produce items comparable in quality to those provided for children attending conventional schools would lead to an exceedingly high per unit cost.

5.53 Revision of Courses. There are a number of factors which together mean that the task of revising and updating correspondence courses has become a major problem for the Correspondence School. Metrication has necessitated the revision of all mathematics courses and has meant changes for some other subjects. Primary mathematics has recently had a major curricular revision which further necessitated modification of the correspondence courses. The introduction of the free book scheme for children in primary schools has meant that a programme of rewriting courses has commenced in order that isolated parents may be able to take advantage of the cost savings enjoyed by other parents. Parents responding to the questionnaire expressed their dissatisfaction with several courses currently in use. The need for extension work in all areas for children in junior years was highlighted. Spelling at all levels requires close attention - there is an apparent need for extension work and certain reorganisation of the grouping of words to facilitate their assimilation. Consideration should be given to modifying primary mathematics courses to cater for children with varying levels of ability. Parents were particularly concerned that the science

programme at primary level remains incompletely developed. Limited access to reference material means that many children find difficulty in completing sets in middle and upper primary social studies. A desire that English be related more to other subjects was expressed. Specific instruction in some techniques of art and crafts was requested. Greater variety and stimulation were needed to enliven creative writing at lower primary level. Taken together, these comments indicate that a continuing effort to up-date courses is desirable. The co-ordination of this effort is, in the opinion of the Headmaster, a task of such magnitude that the appointment of an education officer or senior master (general) may be necessary in order to expedite matters.

5.54 Liaison with Curriculum Branch. Because most correspondence courses rely upon the Education Department booklets produced by the Curriculum Branch, it would appear that there is a need for liaison between members of the Branch and the Western Australian Correspondence School. Curriculum writers have the general problem of overseeing the successful implementation of their courses. The special problem of having courses adapted for correspondence means that curriculum writers and Correspondence School writers could usefully co-operate so that isolated children are not disadvantaged by incomplete utilisation of Departmental texts.

6. SCHOOLS OF THE AIR IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

6.1 Introduction

6.11 Background. The first school of the air was established at Meekatharra in September 1958 with an enrolment of 36 pupils. Between that time and 1968 four more schools of the air were established at Carnarvon, Port Hedland, Derby and Kalgoorlie. The schools of the air enable two-way radio communication between teacher and pupil where otherwise the written word would have to suffice.

The Western Australian Division of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (R.F.D.S.) provides the broadcasting facilities at Meekatharra, Carnarvon and Port Hedland and the Victorian Division provides the facilities at Derby. The Kalgoorlie School of the Air operates over the network provided by the Eastern Goldfields Division of the R.F.D.S.

Only primary students (that is, Years 1 to 7) are permitted to enrol with these schools, and in general, the pupils from one year level have a half hour session each day during which time they may listen and talk to their teacher as well as to each other. Generally the number of students in such a group ranges between five and 10.

The main functions of the schools of the air are to develop and supplement the correspondence courses in each subject area, and to provide work in areas where courses do not yet exist: for example in music.

Essentially the intention is to give outback children daily contact with a teacher and with fellow students. Children gain a group identity as a result of such lessons. Assistance is given to supervisors in such aspects of their job as teaching techniques, daily lesson plans and assignment completion. It should be noted that school of the air teachers mark all work completed by their students. Finally, schools of the air co-operate in activities of local Parents and Citizens' Associations which actively seek to lessen the educational disadvantages experienced by their children.

Details of each school of the air are given in Table XXIII.

TABLE XXIII

SCHOOLS OF THE AIR IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

School	Location	Accommodation	Date Established	Enrolment			Number of Staff 1974
				Initial	1968	1967	
Meekatharra	R.F.D.S. Base	R.F.D.S. Cent-building	1959	36	65	56	2 f/t; 1 p/t
Kimberley	Derby D.H.S.	School of the Air Studio	1960	15	57	39	2 f/t
Kalgoorlie	Kalgoorlie P.S.	Converted classroom	1962	27	64	39	2 f/t
Port Hedland	Pt Hedland P.S.	Classroom being converted	1965	29	26	13	1 f/t
Carnarvon	Carnarvon	School of the Air Studio	1968	32	32	31	1 f/t; 1 p/t
Total					244	178	8 f/t; 2 p/t

6.12 Enrolment. About half of the full-time correspondence pupils are enrolled with a school of the air. The full-time enrolments of each school of the air for the last six years is shown in Table XXIV. The figures show fluctuations from year to year but a slight decline overall. The most consistent enrolment is at Meekatharra.

TABLE XXIV

SCHOOLS OF THE AIR - ENROLMENT OF FULL-TIME PUPILS 1969-1974

School	Enrolment at 1st August					
	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Carnarvon	36	34	26	27	35	31
Derby	52	46	40	47	56	39
Kalgoorlie	57	61	47	40	43	39
Meekatharra	57	58	51	64	59	56
Port Hedland	19	22	21	19	20	13
Total	221	221	185	197	213	178

The two prime determinants of whether a family will enrol its primary school aged children with a school of the air or with the Correspondence School in Perth are the quality of radio reception and the availability of a transceiver.* For example, teachers have reported that from time to time pupils in the East Kimberley area have not been able to be received at the Derby base. Without the Wyndham relay station, reception would be much worse than at present. The availability of transceivers is a complex question. Some families are able to purchase expensive general purpose equipment which they may also use for educational purposes. Other families have been able to purchase cheaper sets licenced for school of the air purposes only. Families unable to purchase their own sets may apply to join a transceiver leasing scheme (described more fully later in this chapter).

Analysis of the questionnaires revealed that a factor related to school of the air enrolment is father's occupation. Table XXV indicates that by far the majority of families whose children are enrolled with a school of the air are pastoralists or station managers. Further, a majority of families enrolled directly with the Correspondence School were classified as being engaged in other occupations. Analysis showed that approximately two thirds of these families resided in areas covered by school of the air transmissions, and hence could have enrolled with the nearest school of the air.

TABLE XXV

METHOD OF SCHOOL BY FATHERS' OCCUPATION

Fathers' Occupation	School of the Air		Correspondence		Rat Island Community School**	
	No.	% of Response	No.	% of Response	No.	% of Response
Pastoralist	36	41%	7	12%	-	-
Station Manager	36	41%	8	14%	-	-
Fisherman	1	1%	7	12%	8	89%
Other	15	17%	35	62%	1	11%
Total	88	100%	57	100%	9	100%

* A number of parents indicated that they had not enrolled their children with a school of the air because they did not wish to have to join their school of the air session at a set time each day.

** Rat Island Community school operates during the Geraldton fishing season when parents hire a teacher who uses Western Australian Correspondence School lessons.

Table XXVI shows the enrolment by year of the five schools of the air at 1st August, 1974. There is a general trend towards smaller enrolments in the higher years, which may be explained in part by children entering private boarding schools as they become older.

TABLE XXVI

SCHOOLS OF THE AIR ENROLMENT BY YEAR AS AT 1ST AUGUST, 1974

School of the Air	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Meekatharra	9	13	11	9	3	7	4	56
Kimberley	8	8	11	1	5	4	2	39
Kalgoorlie	7	8	9	2	4	7	3	39
Port Hedland	3	2	2	1	3	1	1	13
Carnarvon	6	6	6	2	5	4	2	31
Total	33	37	38	15	20	23	12	178

6.2 Administration, Staffing, Accommodation and Equipment

6.21 Classification. Schools of the air are not classified schools. They are part of the Western Australian Correspondence School. The teacher-in-charge of each school receives an allowance as recompense for responsibility taken in addition to that expected of an ordinary teacher. The Survey revealed a desire on the part of interest groups to see schools of the air made autonomous schools and for the position of teacher-in-charge to be made a promotional position. At minimum it was felt that they should be Class IV primary schools, even if they did not fulfil the requisite enrolment level. However, the fact that lesson materials are supplied to these schools by the Western Australian Correspondence School, and the fact that there are significant differences between being in charge of a school of the air and being in charge of a one teacher school, appear to be major arguments against such a change.

6.22 Appointment of Staff. By means of an advertisement in the *Education Circular* and notices placed in small country schools, teachers interested in being appointed to a school of the air are identified. Most teachers are not interested in a school of the air appointment in the long term because of the remoteness of the locality in which they must live. Selectio of the successful applicants take into account certain qualities considered

vital for such a position. School of the air teachers are appointed to the staff of the Western Australian Correspondence School. Not all parents were satisfied with the effectiveness of some school of the air teachers. For example, one parent considered that school of the air was only as valuable as the teacher employed and suggested that specialised training be provided, including at least one month's experience in a home, supervising lessons and gaining insight into the learning environment of isolated children. Several parents complained that because the teacher sometimes spoke for most of the time available, children did not really have the opportunity to participate. However, it must be acknowledged that the performance of teachers in most schools varies considerably and that school of the air teachers are not being especially singled out. Rather, their performance is much more open to public scrutiny.

6.23 Buildings. Diagram 1 shows the plan of the Carnarvon School of the Air Studio. Like the Kimberley School of the Air, the building at Carnarvon was designed and built specifically for the purpose for which it is being used. Major features of this plan are the broadcast studio, office, workroom, entry foyer, store and toilet. Basic equipment includes the broadcast console, a tape recorder, record player and portable microphone which enables children from the local school to participate in broadcast lessons. As indicated in Table XXIII the buildings housing the schools of the air at Kalgoorlie, Meekatharra and Port Hedland originally had other uses and have been modified to incorporate similar features to those of the Carnarvon School of the Air.

6.3 Equipment

6.31 Transceivers. Equipment in the home to receive broadcasts may be of two types. Some families (usually without a telephone service) own a multi-purpose transceiver enabling them to make social, medical and educational calls. Other families have a transceiver known as the Traegar Type 59SA which is licensed for school of the air use only.

1975 will see the introduction of new home transceiver sets to take advantage of the single-side six band (S.S.B.) transmissions which commenced early in 1974. At present, transmission is a modified single-side band frequency (A3H) which enables both double-side band (D.S.B.) and single-side band sets to operate. By 1977 Australia

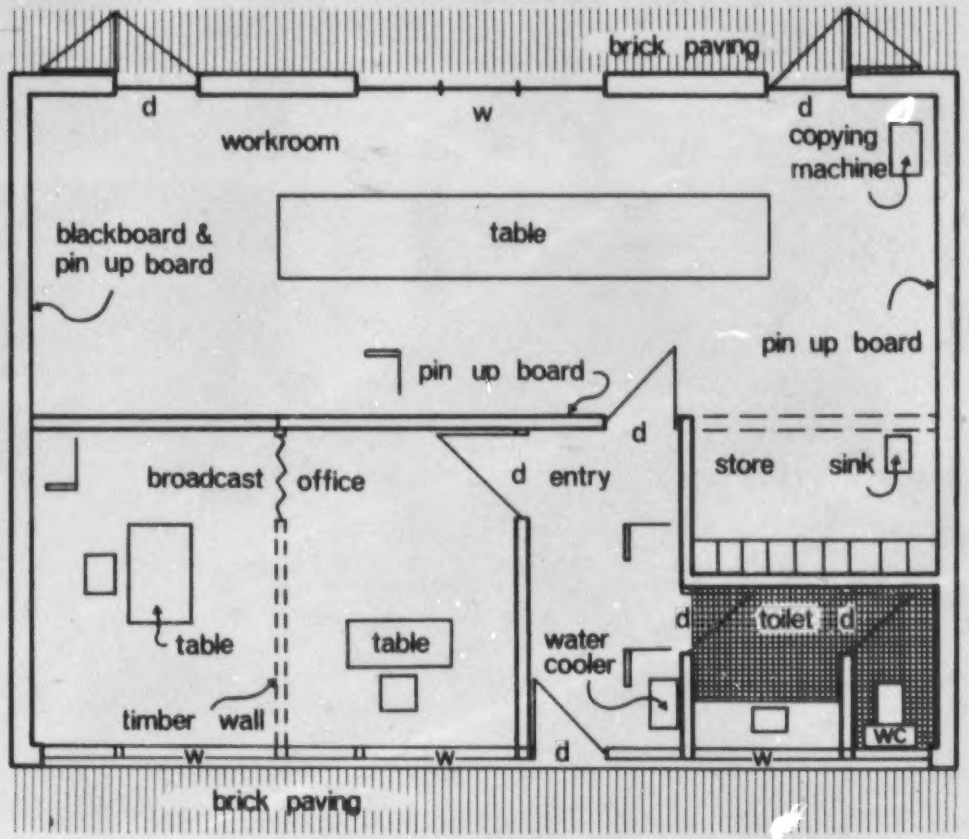

Diagram 1. Carnarvon School of the Air Studio.

is committed to have made a complete change to single-side band (A3J) transmission under the International Telecommunications Union Agreement. The purpose of the change is to improve transmission and reception and reduce interference.

6.32 Transceiver Hire Scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to provide transceiver sets on a rental basis to Correspondence School pupils whose parents are unable to purchase their own sets. School of the air parents and citizens' groups act as the leasing agent and contribute one third of the purchase cost. The Education Department and the Lotteries Commission provide the balance. The sets leased are Traegar 59SAs and currently there are 28 such sets on hire (Carnarvon 4, Kalgoorlie 7, Meekatharra 10 and Port Hedland 7). Rental is set at $8 per term ($24 per year) and is paid to the local parents and citizens' association who in turn are responsible for freight costs, insurance, licence fees and maintenance. The licence is vested in the Headmaster of the Western Australian Correspondence School.

6.33 Changeover to Single Side Band Transmission. Whereas the Traegar double-side band sets mentioned above cost $225 to purchase, the new single-side band sets were estimated to cost at least $700 each. The Australian Department of Education has agreed to replace all D.S.B. sets currently in use and licensed for schools of the air use only with new S.S.B. sets at no additional cost to lessees. A tender for the supply of 28 S.S.B. sets to replace those currently on lease has been let at a unit cost of $795 for a two channel set and $830 for a three channel set.

In addition, parents owning an old Traegar 59SA school of the air set may have their sets replaced by the new S.S.B. sets but they would lease these from the Education Department. Steps to ascertain the exact number of parents in this category are in progress.

There is at present no financial assistance available for those parents who use their transceivers for general purposes as well as school of the air and who must also changeover to an S.S.B. set by 1977.

Because of the more precise definition of broadcast frequency permitted by S.S.B. transmission, the opportunity to establish a channel exclusively for educational use may result in greater broadcasting time being available to the schools of the air.

.4 Mode of Operation

Since school of the air broadcasts are made over the R.F.D.S. network, which is also used for normal traffic and medical sessions, time is necessarily limited. Generally, six twenty-minute sessions are broadcast each school day for Years 1-7. In some cases, a ten-minute period at the end of the lessons deals with individual difficulties, parents' queries, oral reports, and examination of selected students. Table XXVII is a typical timetable. Day to day variation within a school is difficult and notification must precede any such action or children may not be available at the right time.

TABLE XXVII

A TYPICAL SCHOOL OF THE AIR TIMETABLE

Year	Time	Broadcast Lessons				
		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	9.15--9.35	News Mathematics	Reading	Oral Expression Mathematics	Phonics Mathematics	Music/Creative Writing Literature
2	10.10--10.30	News Spelling	Mathematics Creative Writing	Dictation/ Social Studies Music	Reading Oral Mathematics	Oval Expression Literature
3	9.50--10.10	News Mathematics	Poetry/Oral Expression Reading	Creative Writing Spelling	Word Building Dictation	Social Studies/ Music Literature
4	8.35--8.50	Oral Expression Arithmetic	Mental Reading	Spelling Word Bldg. Social Studies	English Music/ Science	Oral Expression Literature
5	1.00--1.20	Oral Expression Arithmetic	Mental Music	Spelling Word Bldg. Social Studies	English/ Science Literature	Oral Expression Reading
6	1.00--1.40	Oral Expression Arithmetic	Mental Music	Spelling Word Bldg. Social Studies	English/ Science Literature	Oral Expression Reading

Usually the broadcasting period is divided into three sections:

(a) Roll call and social contact: the roll is called and each child speaks briefly to his teacher and class mates.

(b) The day's lesson: this is conducted as in a normal classroom, and is generally based on difficulties occurring in assignments.

(c) Section for dealing with individual difficulties and queries.

7. PROJECTED PLANS FOR THE EDUCATION OF ISOLATED CHILDREN

7.1 Chidley Centre - Special Educational Facility for Isolated Children

7.11 Introduction. The education of children living in isolated locations poses many problems. There are, however, particular problems associated with the provision of remedial and special education for such children.

In the classroom the diagnosis and rectification of learning failure can be a considerable task that taxes the resources of the trained teacher. The problem is even more acute in the correspondence situation because of the wide separation of teacher and pupil. Learning difficulties that become obvious to the classroom teacher, and which can be quickly remedied, are often not detected by the correspondence teacher or by the supervising parent. If they are not detected at an early stage they may develop until there is a need for the close personal attention of a trained remedial teacher. More seriously, children who suffer from physical or mental impairment and do not have these recognized or diagnosed, may require the attention of specialist medical and psychological services.

In most cases learning difficulty is rarely, if ever, based on a single cause. Most educational researchers would agree that there is no single disability that bears a perfect relationship with attainment in any school subject. There is a multitude of factors within a child that might contribute to a particular learning disability. This may include intelligence, psycholinguistic abilities, physical factors, visual and auditory perception, growth and development, social-emotional factors, environmental or neurological factors.

7.12 Special Education and the Rural Child. At the present most State special education services are located in the metropolitan area of Perth, or in larger country centres.

Under existing arrangements children in small country centres and in remote areas who suffer from some form of physical or mental handicap must travel to Perth in order to receive specialized educational training. Children with speech, hearing or vision defects or those requiring some form of hospitalisation or specialised care, as may be found, for instance, in a maladaptive unit, a training centre or medical centre, are often required to board in Perth for short or extended periods.

Apart from the cost of boarding away from home which may be prohibitive to parents, there is the problem, especially with young children, of separating them from their parents for what may seem an extended time. The Chidley Centre was proposed in order to meet the basic needs of these students and parents.

7.13 The Chidley Centre. The Centre is designed to provide residential and remedial facilities as well as up-to-date general educational facilities. The provision of advisory services to parents is seen as an important function of the Centre so that they, as supervisors, become more aware of child development and symptoms of learning difficulty.

The Centre will consist of two blocks of cottage-type residential accommodation for 40 children, with residential accommodation for matrons. The following diagram shows the ground floor plan.

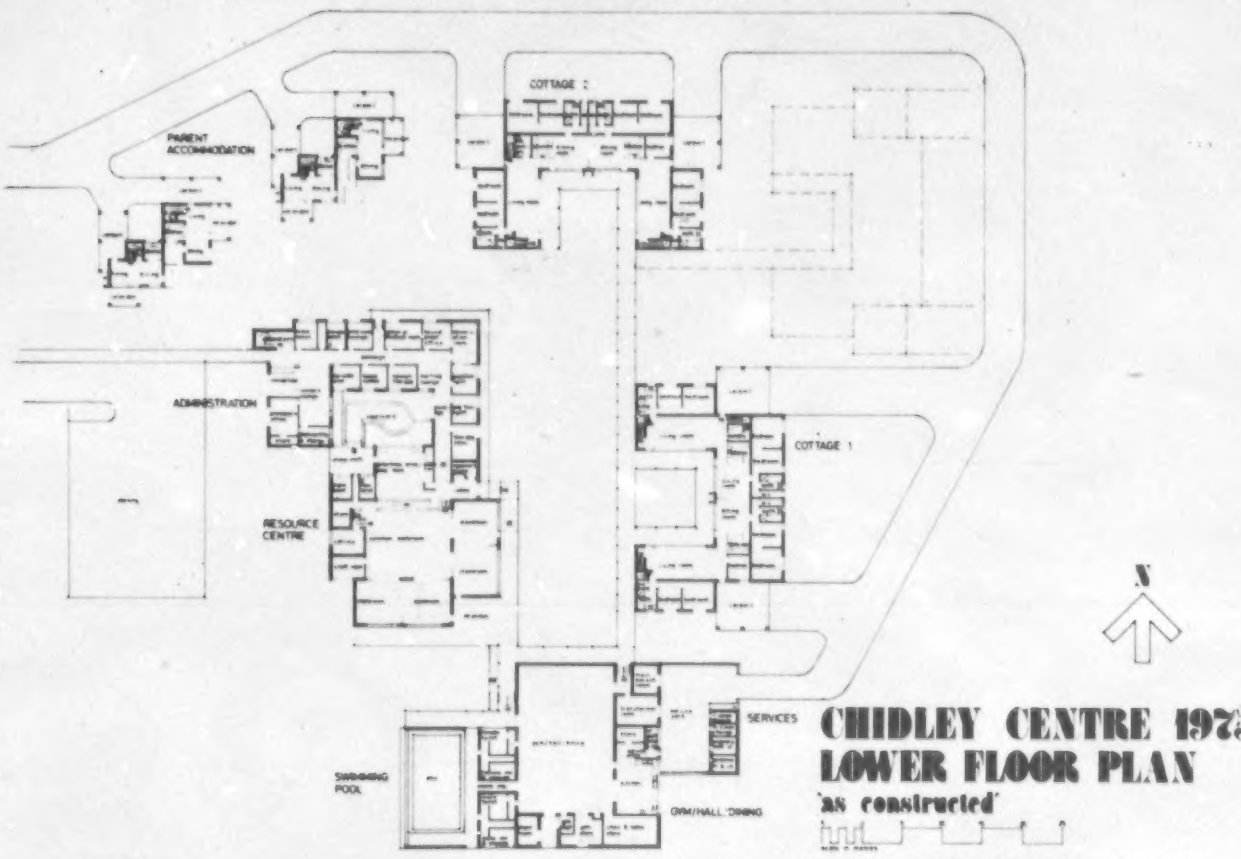

Diagram 2

The administration section is a multi-disciplinary assessment centre which includes facilities for medical, psychological, social and special therapy services.

The educational complex includes spaces of varying design and function, individual study carrels, a library/resource centre, seminar rooms, conference rooms and other specialized rooms.

In another part of the Centre there is a hall/gymnasium which can be used as a dining hall, and close by is an enclosed swimming pool.

Of five possible sites, Chidley Point (Reserve 25467) was chosen mainly because of its proximity to Perth where medical, psychological, educational and other essential services are available. The site fronts on to Owston Street in Mosman Park. It is ten miles from Perth and about three miles from Fremantle. It is about two miles from the main highway between Perth and Fremantle and within half a mile of an existing bus service.

On 8th November, 1974 the Education Department accepted a tender to build the Chidley Centre for the contract sum of $893,496. The date for completion of the contract was set as 8th October 1975.

7.14 Parents' View. In the Survey parents were asked several questions concerning various aspects of attendance at the school. The response showed that most parents would allow their children to attend the school. However, this was qualified by the age of the child and whether or not a parent could attend with a child.

Table XXVIII shows the expected trend that a great number of parents would wish to attend with their children, especially the younger children under eight years.

TABLE XXVIII

PARENTS' VIEWS ON THEIR CHILDREN ATTENDING THE SPECIAL SCHOOL BY AGE OF
(Number and percentage of response)

Age of Child	Would allow to attend without parents		Would allow to attend with parents	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Under 8 years	32 (39%)	30 (54%)	59 (54%)	10 (40%)
8 years and over	51 (61%)	25 (46%)	50 (46%)	15 (60%)
Total	83(100%)	55(100%)	109(100%)	25(100%)

Although it is highly desirable that in most cases a parent attends the school with a child, often the parents' lives are governed by station demands and they may not be able to leave work at a given time. Table XXIX shows that 72 per cent of parents could attend but that half of these could only attend at certain times during the year. Some said that they could attend any time between June and December, other said "not during the wet season", while others said that it would not be possible during shearing, mustering or other peak work periods.

TABLE XXIX

PARENTS' VIEWS ON ATTENDING THE SPECIAL SCHOOL WITH A CHILD
(Number and percentage of response)

Parents' View	No. of Families	% of Response
1. Yes, at any time of the year	35	36%
2. Yes, but only at some times of the year	35	36%
3. No	27	28%
Total	97	100%

Three of the main reasons given by the 27 parents who indicated that they could not attend the school with their child were lack of finance, other young children in the family to be cared for and both parents working. This is not an extensive coverage of reasons but it suffices to point up some of the problems which may be encountered when parents are invited to attend the school with their children. Part of the solution may lie in planning to have the school open on a 48 week a year basis, the only times of closure being term holidays. The Christmas/New Year period is a time when many people from isolated areas visit the city and it appears to be essential for the Centre to be open during this period. Adequate assessment and improved parent preparation during this period might well prevent some problems occurring.

7.15 Incidence of Learning Difficulties. Estimates of the percentage of children requiring specialized educational care within the population vary with respect to the incidence of particular factors causing retardation. The Survey indicated that about one quarter of parents with children on correspondence felt that their child had some learning problem which could possibly be alleviated by a short stay at the Chidley

Centre. However, this figure would be difficult to validate. It would be necessary for a suitably qualified person to closely study the children concerned.

On this basis there would be at any one time a potential group of about 100 students enrolled in correspondence classes and school of the air who would be in need of specialised assistance although this number would vary from year to year.

7.2 Isolated Schools Matriculation Project

7.21 Introduction. Presently the educational needs of children in remote areas are being met by correspondence tuition managed by the Correspondence School of the Education Department, the schools of the air, small primary schools and district high schools. These services are supplied for children to enable them to complete seven years of primary and three years of secondary schooling. Those children who want to continue their secondary education with a view to sitting for the Leaving Certificate or qualifying for entrance to tertiary education are obliged to leave home and seek private accommodation or reside in hostels away from home.

Other countries have had wide experience in providing secondary education including Matriculation level instruction, for students in small remote schools. New Zealand is one such country. There the approach has been one of providing special advice and curricula for children who find themselves in this situation. This style of education is in keeping with recent world-wide trends in which students are recognized as being more independent, responsible, and capable of managing their own learning experiences than teachers and the public have generally admitted. This notion of respecting the child's ability to largely govern his own learning has found its way into the very lowest grades of the primary school. Open plan primary schools and the general philosophy of open education recognise this ability of children. Some educators see teachers often inhibiting the learning experiences of children by over-supervising and too closely directing the educational experiences of the children.

At a tertiary level this new awareness among educators has been expressed through the provision of well equipped and staffed extension services in tertiary institutions. Locally, the Western Australian Institute of Technology, the University of Western Australia and soon Murdoch University will be operating services on a correspondence and tutorial basis especially for those who live in outlying districts. They see the bricksand mortar, that is the building part of the institution, as not being a pre-requisite for effective instruction, and the requirement that students continuously attend this central institution as being unnecessary.

The Isolated Schools Matriculation Project is intended to provide educational facilities to external students via an open-university type organization. Essentially the project will provide the necessary curriculum materials and student and teacher guides that will enable students to study subjects at Matriculation level without specialised teacher backup at the students' immediate call. In general it is expected that the clientele will be drawn from the students who opt, for various reasons, to pursue their studies into eleventh and twelfth year without any hiatus in their sequence of schooling. Thus, it is not intended to enrol mature age students who might currently be catered for by the Technical Education Division's Extension Services.

The programme is seen as an alternative route to achieving Matriculation level status for senior secondary students. While not an immediate goal, an additional outcome of the project will be to provide options for schools which have such small numbers of students wishing to pursue a particular subject that they are not able to provide instruction in the conventional way. Also the materials and procedures developed might eventually provide an alternative to the traditional teaching procedures followed in all high schools. These additional goals will provide a quality control on the programme.

7.22 Implementation. This is essentially a pilot project. Before major commitments can be made materials and courses must be developed, evaluated and shown to be satisfactory. Depending upon initial results a wider spectrum of subjects may be introduced. However, in the initial stages a group of subjects has been chosen for development

on the basis that they will cater for a large and varied number of interests and that they are viable for development from a practical point of view. The subjects currently included are English, history, human biology, biology, two mathematics courses, technical drawing and art.

As well as producing curriculum materials, presented in a variety of appropriate media, the project has a social component. It is recognized that students, particularly in small rural towns with few peers of comparable age, have special social needs. For these students to be educated in the fullest sense it is important that they associate with numbers of peers and acquire the skills of co-operating and mixing, learning to be leaders and followers as situations demand. These skills cannot be catered for in a school situation in which only one or two students of comparable age and social maturity are present. It is proposed that students who proceed with these special courses will have special opportunities to meet their fellow students at residential camps and on other occasions.

Special attention will be given to the early training of students in the essential study habits necessary for success in each subject. This training might also include an intensive period devoted to the development of speed reading techniques.

The project is not expected to begin in schools on a pilot basis until 1976. Hence the entire period up to the end of 1975 is expected to be devoted to developing materials and administrative procedures. Evaluation of the pilot programme will lead to modification of courses which will be offered in 1977 to a wider audience of students wishing to study under this scheme. The development of materials will necessarily continue as the programme is implemented.

8. MAJOR FINDINGS

As part of the Survey, information was collected pertaining to certain demographic characteristics of the population of geographically isolated families. This included the occupation of fathers, the age of children enrolled for correspondence education, the distance of families from their nearest Government primary school and the degree of permanency of residence of such families. It was found, for example, that 57 per cent of respondents lived between 33 and 161 kilometres from their nearest Government primary school and 33 per cent were more than 161 kilometres away. Further, there appeared to be a great degree of permanence of residence with 35 per cent having lived in their present location for 10 or more years and 43 per cent between one and 10 years.

Parents drew attention to the need to improve the publicity regarding the range and availability of financial assistance for isolated children. The present scheme for reimbursement of travel costs associated with camp schools was considered to be inadequate.

The importance of the printed word in correspondence education raised questions regarding the quality of lesson sheets. Eighty-three per cent o parents considered that the overall quality was satisfactory. However, some improvements to the physical appearance of sheets was suggested. The most favoured were greater use of colour, illustrations and photographs. Qualitatively, certain educational shortcomings were detected in a sample of lesson sheets which were reviewed. These pointed to the need for teachers with very recent classroom experience to closely liaise with specialist Education Department staff such as curriculum writers and audio-visual officers in order to improve the quality of lessons.

A small number of parents referred to a number of subjects which they would like to see added to or deleted from the present list of available subjects.

Parental reaction to the experimental use of filmstrips and audio cassette tapes showed that the successful use of such media requires careful planning by course writers and media experts, as well as suitable production facilities.

Seventy-five per cent of the persons supervising children's lessons were the mothers of the children they were supervising. Only 25 governesses were employed (16 per cent of families). Perceived problems included the great emotional strain of having to be mother and teacher, obtaining feedback on the progress of the child, diagnosing particular learning difficulties and having adequate personal and physical resources to take the place of the teacher in a school.

Many parents saw greater financial assistance to enable the employment of a trained governess as the most important improvement that could be made. Visits by advisory teachers and training courses for supervisors were highly recommended. The social value of camp schools was widely appreciated.

Serious inadequacies in the present accommodation of Correspondence School staff were highlighted by staff comments and observations made by the authors.

Widespread praise for the schools of the air was indicated. Some parents wished to see these declared schools in their own right with headmasters appointed to this position in a promotional capacity rather than under the Western Australian Correspondence School.

The history of the Western Australian Correspondence School illustrates the key themes of continuity and change, challenge and response. Enrolment trends indicate that there will continue to be a significant number of children living in geographically isolated areas for whom correspondence education will be necessary. Moreover, the level of enrolment during the last five years has remained quite stable.

The themes of change and response are illustrated by the special educational centre for isolated children being built at Chidley Point and the Isolated Schools Matriculation Project. Both of these developments are in response to the desire to maintain equality of educational opportunity for isolated children in Western Australia.

APPENDIX I: ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN

The Australian Government provides assistance to the parents of of children who, because of the geographic isolation of their homes, do not have reasonable access to a Government school offering courses in the appropriate year of primary or secondary schooling. This assistance is in the form of boarding allowances, an allowance for correspondence studies, or an allowance towards the cost of maintaining a second home.

CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY

A. General

(1) The student's home must be at least 10 miles from the nearest Government school which provides tuition in the grade or year of schooling in which the student is qualified to enrol, and at least three miles from the nearest transport service to that school.

Note: Students whose homes are within three miles of a transport service providing access to a Government school which offers tuition in the appropriate grade or year will normally not qualify for assistance. However, such students may be eligible if their home is at least 35 miles from the school or if the travelling time by the available transport is at least one and a half hours each way. Assistance may be provided to these students if, to avoid travelling on a daily basis, they live away from home to attend school or study by correspondence. Where a claim is made on these grounds, full details should be provided in Section C of the application from SS101, so that an assessment of the applicant's entitlement may be made.

(2) The student and his/her parents must be Australian citizens or permanent residents of Australia and their home must be in Australia.

(3) The student must be attending an approved primary or secondary school on a full-time basis. In the case of correspondence students this means enrolment with the appropriate State Education Department Correspondence School.

Further information and application forms are available from the Regional Director, Western Australian State Office, Australian Department of Education, 20-22 Stirling Highway, Nedlands W.A. 6009.

APPENDIX II: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION ON CHILDREN IN ISOLATED AREAS

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